

# should have, could have etc

We can use **should have, could have etc + past participle** to talk about **'unreal' past situations** that are the opposite of what really happened.

*You **should have been** here an hour ago. (But you weren't.)*  
*Alice **should never have bought** that car. (But she did.)*  
*I was so angry I **could have killed** her. (But I didn't.)*  
*She **could have married** anybody she wanted to. (But she didn't.)*  
*Jumping out of the window like that – he **could/might have broken** his leg.*  
*If I'd known you were coming, I **would have stayed** in.*

We can use this structure to criticise people for not doing things.

*You **could have helped** me! (Why didn't you?)*  
*You **might have let** me know you weren't coming – I stayed in all evening.*

**1 Complete the sentences with *should have ..., could have ..., might have ... or would have ...* More than one answer may be possible.**

- 1 He \_\_\_\_ me last week. (*pay*)
- 2 You \_\_\_\_ somebody, driving like that. (*kill*)
- 3 I \_\_\_\_ you, but I didn't have your number. (*phone*)
- 4 If my parents hadn't been so poor, I \_\_\_\_ to university. (*go*)
- 5 It's his fault she left him; he \_\_\_\_ nicer to her. (*be*)
- 6 I \_\_\_\_ more garlic in the soup. (*put*)
- 7 If you needed money, you \_\_\_\_ me. (*ask*)
- 8 'We got lost in the mountains.' 'You fools – you \_\_\_\_ a map.' (*take*)
- 9 It's a good thing they got her to hospital in time. She \_\_\_\_\_. (*die*)
- 10 When he said that to me I \_\_\_\_ him. (*hit*)
- 11 You \_\_\_\_ me you were bringing your friends to supper! (*tell*)
- 12 You \_\_\_\_ my jeans after you borrowed them. (*wash*)

This structure can also be used to talk about **things that are not certain to have happened**, or that we **suppose** (but don't know definitely) have happened. *May have ...* is common in these senses.

*I **may have left** my keys here this morning – have you seen them?*  
*He **should have arrived** home by now. Let's phone him.*  
*So you went to Australia. That **must have been** nice.*  
*Where is she? She **can't have gone** out – the door's locked.*

**2 Complete the sentences with *may have ...*, *should have ...*, *must have ...* or *can't have ...*. More than one answer may be possible.**

- 1 'Where's Phil?' 'I don't know. He \_\_\_ home.' (*go*)
- 2 'How are the builders getting on?' 'They \_\_\_ by now. I'll go and see.' (*finish*)
- 3 'Ann isn't here.' 'Surely she \_\_\_ - I reminded her yesterday.' (*forget*)
- 4 The garden's all wet. It \_\_\_ in the night. (*rain*)
- 5 'We went to Dublin for the weekend.' 'That \_\_\_ a nice change.' (*be*)
- 6 'Who phoned?' 'She didn't give her name. It \_\_\_ Lucy.' (*be*)
- 7 He \_\_\_ all his money. I gave him £10 only yesterday! (*spend*)
- 8 I \_\_\_ a new job. I'll know for certain tomorrow. (*find*)
- 9 The car's got a big dent in the side. Bernie \_\_\_ an accident. (*have*)
- 10 They're not at home. They \_\_\_ away for the weekend. (*go*)

Note the differences between ***may not have ...*** and ***can't have ...***, and between ***had to ...*** and ***must have ...***

*They **may not have arrived** yet.* (= Perhaps they haven't arrived.)

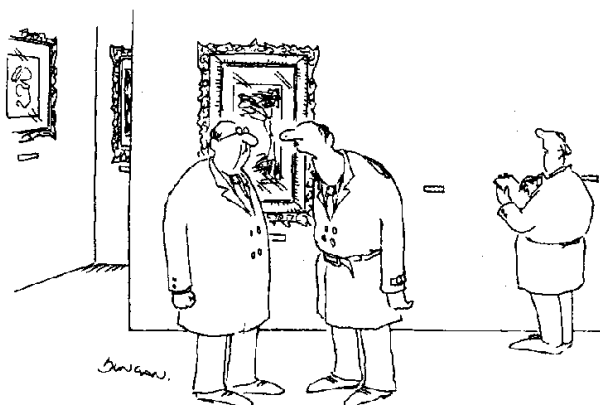
*They **can't have arrived** yet.* (= They certainly haven't arrived.)

*Joe **had to go** home.* (= It was necessary for him to go home.)

*Joe **must have gone** home.* (= It seems certain that he has gone home.)

**3 Put in *may not have ...*, *can't have ...*, *had to ...* or *must have ...***

- 1 Shakespeare \_\_\_ been to Australia because it hadn't been discovered.
- 2 King Arthur \_\_\_ existed - nobody's sure.
- 3 Castles in the Middle Ages \_\_\_ been cold places.
- 4 People in those days \_\_\_ get their water from wells and streams.
- 5 Poor people five hundred years ago - \_\_\_ had easy lives.
- 6 But they \_\_\_ been unhappier than us.



'All the exits have been sealed off. He must have got out through the entrance.'