

Past modals and phrasal modals of obligation

Some past modals and phrasal modals of obligation are stronger than others.

Strong obligation: To show that there was no choice about doing the action, use *had to*. (Note that *must* is not used in the past.)

My parents **had to** go to school on Saturdays.

Expectation: There was a general expectation that an action was required or prohibited.

She **was supposed to** talk to her professor after class. (But she probably didn't.)

He **wasn't supposed to** drive the car to school. (But he probably did.)

Advisability: There was a good idea or a correct action in a particular situation, but it was or was not done.

He **should have** taken better notes in class. (But he didn't.)

She **shouldn't have** bought such an expensive jacket. (But she did.)

Necessity: The action was considered to be necessary or unnecessary. However, unlike *had to*, there is a choice about doing or not doing the action.

I **needed to** make an appointment with the counselor.

I **didn't need to** buy the textbook, but I thought it looked interesting.

No obligation: There is complete choice about doing the action.

I **didn't have to** take piano lessons, but I wanted to.

1 Choose the correct answer to complete the sentence.

1. Jan *should have* / *shouldn't have* ignored the problem because it only got worse.
2. I *was supposed to* / *didn't have to* go on vacation, but I didn't save enough money.
3. Yoko *needed to* / *wasn't supposed to* ignore her parents' advice, but she did.
4. He fixed the leak himself, so he *didn't need to call* / *should have called* a plumber.
5. When I got older, I *had to* / *wasn't supposed to* learn to solve my own problems.
6. I *needed to* / *didn't have to* book my flight so early, but I wanted a good seat.

2 Complete the sentences with *(not) had to*, *was (not) supposed to*, *should (not) have*, or *(not) needed to* and the correct form of the verb in parentheses. Sometimes more than one answer is possible.

1. A: I heard Rob's cell phone rang in the middle of the test. What happened?

B: He had to leave (leave) the room immediately and was given a failing grade.

2. A: You're home early, Jenny. I thought your English exam lasted until 4:00.

B: I finished early, and the teacher said I _____ (stay) if I didn't want to.

3. A: Have you seen Steven this morning? He's late for the test.

B: No, I haven't. He _____ (meet) me for breakfast, but he didn't show up.

4. A: The teacher recommends using a pencil on tests so you can erase wrong answers.

B: Yes, and I _____ (follow) his advice. I made a real mess with my pen.

