

Modality in Context: Exploring Deduction and Regret in English Songs

Level: Pre-/Intermediate–Upper-Intermediate (B1–B2)

Time: ~90 minutes

Focus: Past modals of deduction (must/can't/might have + V3) and past modals of regret (should/shouldn't have + V3)

Lesson Learning Outcomes

By the end of this worksheet, you will be able to use past modals of deduction (must/can't/might have been) and past modals of regret (should/shouldn't have) to talk accurately about past events, relationships, and decisions.

You will build this outcome through four competencies:

1. **Competence.** Use past modals of deduction and regret accurately in speaking and writing, choosing the modal that matches your level of certainty.
2. **Conscience.** Reflect on how certainty and regret language affects self-judgment, and separate healthy reflection from excessive self-blame.
3. **Compassion.** Respond empathetically to the experiences of loss and regret in the songs.
4. **Commitment.** Apply the language of uncertainty and regret to a real or imagined decision, moving from reflection to intention.

Get ready to start!

Part A — Warm-Up (10 minutes)

Answer the questions. Try to use your own experience or imagination.

1. Have you ever looked back on a relationship or a decision and thought, “That must have been real love” — or the opposite?
2. Have you ever felt like “the fool” in a relationship, realizing too late that

something was wrong?

Quick Review: Modals of Deduction

A deduction is a logical guess based on evidence. Example: If you see wet umbrellas by the door, you might say, "It must have rained." You didn't see the rain, but the clues make you confident.

We use modals (must, can't, might, could) to show how sure we are.

Certainty	Present	Past
Almost certain (positive)	must + V1	must have + V3
Almost certain (negative)	can't / couldn't + V1	can't / couldn't have + V3
Possible	might / could + V1	might / could have + V3

Part B – Grammar Focus 1: Past Modals of Deduction

Use past modals of deduction to make a logical guess about something that already happened.

MUST HAVE + past participle (V3) → strong, positive conclusion
e.g. She isn't answering her phone. She must have gone to bed early.

CAN'T / COULDN'T HAVE + past participle (V3) → strong, negative conclusion
e.g. He can't have finished the report already – he only started an hour ago.

MIGHT / COULD HAVE + past participle (V3) → possible (not certain)
e.g. She might have missed the bus – that's why she's late.

Exercise 1 – Complete the deduction

Complete each sentence with **must have / can't have / might have** + the correct past participle. More than one answer may be possible.

1. Sarah is crying and her phone is smashed on the floor. Something terrible

2. Tom said he was broke last week, but now he's driving a brand-new car. He

3. I texted Mia an hour ago and she hasn't replied. She

4. The lights are off and the car isn't in the driveway. They

5. Ben looked really happy when he left the meeting. The interview

Part C – Song Focus 1: "It Must Have Been Love" (Roxette, 1990)

This ballad looks back on a relationship that ended. The speaker tries to decide how real it was.

Before you listen

Look at the title. What decision is the singer trying to make? Does she sound certain it was love, or still unsure? Discuss.

While you listen – Gap-Fill

Listen to the song (YouTube/Spotify) and follow the lyrics. The repeated hook line is missing. Each time you hear it, write the missing phrase in blanks (1)–(9).

_____(1)

But it's over now
Lay a whisper on my pillow
Leave the winter on the ground
I wake up lonely, this air of silence
In the bedroom and all around
Touch me now, I close my eyes

And dream away

Chorus:

It _____ (2), but it's over now

It _____ (3), but I lost it somehow

It _____ (4), but it's over now

From the moment we touched, 'til the time had run out

Make-believing we're together

That I'm sheltered by your heart

But in and outside I turn to water

Like a teardrop in your palm

And it's a hard winter's day

I dream away

It _____ (5), but it's over now

It was all that I wanted, now I'm living without

It _____ (6), but it's over now

It's where the water flows

It's where the wind blows

Chorus:

Yeah, it _____ (7), but it's over now

It was all that I wanted, now I'm living without

It _____ (8), but it's over now

It's where the water flows

It's where the wind blows

but it's over now

No, no, no

(It _____ (9))

(But it's over now) but it's over now

No, no, no

Write your interpretation of meaning!

In 2–3 sentences, explain what you think the singer has concluded about the relationship by the end of the song.

After you listen – Comprehension

1. By the end of the song, does the singer sound like she has accepted that the relationship is over, or is she still confused? What clues tell you this?
2. Find the line that gives the song its title. What is she concluding about the relationship, and how certain does she sound?
3. The song mixes certainty ("must have been") with images of loss (an empty house, a heart breaking). Why do you think the songwriter combines these two ideas?

Grammar application

Using the line(s) you noted as a model, write **THREE** new sentences about a past relationship, situation, or mystery: one with **must have been**, one with **might have been**, and one with **can't have been**. Use your imagination; they do not need to be true.

1. **must have been:** _____
2. **might have been:** _____
3. **can't have been:** _____

Part D – Grammar Focus 2: Past Modals of Regret

Use past modals of regret to criticize a past choice or express that a different action was better.

SHOULD HAVE + past participle (V3) → the better choice didn't happen (regret / criticism)

e.g. I should have called her back – now she's upset with me.

SHOULDN'T HAVE + past participle (V3) → something happened, but it was the wrong choice

e.g. You shouldn't have said that to him – it really hurt his feelings.

Exercise 2 – Regrets

Complete each sentence with **should have** or **shouldn't have** + the correct

past participle.

1. I failed the test. I _____
2. We got lost on the way here. We _____
3. He told her secret to everyone. He _____
4. She ignored all the warning signs. She _____
5. They spent all their savings on the trip. They _____

Part E — Song Focus 2: "Fool Again" (Westlife, 2000)

This song is about heartbreak and betrayal. The singer looks back and admits he ignored warning signs.

Before you listen

From the title "Fool Again," predict: What kind of regret will you hear? Does the singer blame himself, his partner, or both? Discuss.

While you listen — Sing Along

Follow the full lyrics as you listen (pre-chorus / chorus / verse / bridge). Sing along if you like. This time there are no blanks—just listen carefully for every **should have / shouldn't have** idea.

Baby, I know the story

I've seen the picture, it's written all over your face
Tell me, what's the secret that you've been hiding
And who's gonna take my place?

Pre-chorus:

I should have seen it coming
I should have read the signs
Anyway, I guess it's over

Chorus:

Can't believe that I'm the fool again
I thought this love would never end
How was I to know?
You never told me

Can't believe that I'm the fool again
And I, who thought you were my friend
How was I to know?
You never told me

Verse:

Baby, you should've called me
When you were lonely, when you needed me to be there
Sadly, you never gave me too many chances
To show you how much I care

Pre-chorus:

Ooh, I should have seen it coming
I should have read the signs
Anyway (anyway), I guess it's over

Chorus:

Can't believe that I'm the fool again
I thought this love would never end
How was I to know?
You never told me

Can't believe that I'm the fool again
And I, who thought you were my friend
How was I to know?
You never told me

Bridge:

About the pain and the tears, ooh
If I could, I would turn back the time
Ooh, yeah

Pre-chorus:

I should have seen it coming
I should have read the signs
Anyway (anyway), I guess it's over

Chorus:

Can't believe that I'm the fool again
I thought this love would never end
How was I to know? (How was I to know?)
You never told me (tell me, baby)

Can't believe that I'm the fool again
And I, who thought you were my friend (you played me, I'm the fool)
How was I to know?
You never told me

Can't believe that I'm the fool again
I thought this love would never end
How was I to know? (How was I to know)
You never told me (that I'm the fool again?)

Outro:

Can't believe that I'm the fool again (fool again)
Ooh, yeah, fool again
How was I to know? (Fool again)
You never told me
Can't believe that I'm the fool again
I thought this love would never end

Sing along, and write down: what does he regret?

After you listen — Comprehension

1. What does the singer say he "should have" done differently? List at least two things.
2. Does the singer blame himself, his partner, or both? Support your answer with evidence from the song.
3. Compare the mood of this song to "It Must Have Been Love." Which song sounds more regretful, and which sounds more reflective/uncertain?

Write your interpretation of meaning!

In 2–3 sentences, explain what you think the singer wishes he had done differently, and why.

Grammar application

Imagine you are a close friend giving advice after hearing his story. Write **THREE** sentences using **should have / shouldn't have** to tell him what he could have done differently.

Part F — Integration & Production (15 minutes)

Now combine both grammar points (deduction + regret) and produce your own accurate sentences.

Exercise 3 — Error correction

Each sentence has **ONE** mistake with a past modal. Find it and correct it.

1. She must has been very tired after the long flight. →

2. He shouldn't have said nothing to her about the surprise. →

3. They can't have leave without saying goodbye. →

4. I should to have listened to my parents' advice. →

5. You might have forget your keys at the office. →

Exercise 4 — Personal writing

Write a short paragraph (5–6 sentences) about a real or imagined situation — a relationship, a decision, or a mistake. Use **AT LEAST THREE** different past modals from this worksheet (must have been, might have been, can't have

been, should have, shouldn't have).

Pair discussion

Swap paragraphs with a partner. Can you find at least three past modals in their writing? Ask one follow-up question about their story.

Part G — Exit Ticket

In one sentence, use a past modal to sum up how you feel about today's lesson.

Example: "That must have been the most useful grammar lesson this month!"

My sentence: _____

References

Swan, M. (2016). *Practical English Usage* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Murphy, R. (2019). *English Grammar in Use* (5th ed.). Cambridge University Press.