PAST MODALS AND PHRASAL MODALS OF OBLIGATION

Reading: If I Could Go Back in Time...

Read the following text about Daniel's past decisions and regrets.

If I Could Go Back in Time...

When Daniel thinks about his university years, he realizes that he made several decisions he would change today. His parents always encouraged him to study medicine, so he **had to attend** extra science classes during high school. However, he was more interested in art and design.

During his first year at university, he **was supposed to** concentrate on his studies, but he spent most of his free time playing video games. He now believes he **should have organized** his time better and **shouldn't have ignored** his professors' advice.

One summer, he received an opportunity to study abroad, but he rejected it because he was afraid of leaving his family. Looking back, he thinks he **should have accepted** the offer. He also **needed to** improve his English before applying, but he never made enough effort.

Fortunately, he **didn't have to** pay for all his university expenses because he received a scholarship. He also **didn't need to** buy expensive textbooks since the university library provided free copies.

Today, Daniel works as a graphic designer. Although he enjoys his career, he **wishes he had been** more confident in the past. He believes that some experiences **could have changed** his life completely.

Past modals and phrasal modals of obligation

We use different expressions to talk about past obligations, expectations, recommendations, necessities, and situations in which there was no obligation.

A. Strong obligation – HAD TO

We use had to + base form when an action was necessary and there was no choice.

- Daniel had to attend extra science classes.
- We had to wear uniforms at school.

Remember: We do not use MUST to express past obligation. Use HAD TO instead.

B. Expectations – WAS/WERE SUPPOSED TO

We use was/were supposed to + base form to describe something that was expected or required to happen in the past.

- Daniel was supposed to concentrate on his studies.
- They weren't supposed to use their phones during the exam.

The negative form can express something that was prohibited or not expected.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

C. Advisability and regrets – SHOULD HAVE / SHOULDN'T HAVE

We use should have + past participle to express an action that was a good idea but did not happen. We use shouldn't have + past participle when someone did something that was a bad idea.

- He should have organized his time better. (He didn't.)
- She should have accepted the opportunity. (She didn't.)
- He shouldn't have ignored his professors' advice. (He did.)

D. Necessity – NEEDED TO / DIDN'T NEED TO

We use needed to + base form to express something that was necessary in the past. We use didn't need to + base form when something was unnecessary.

- Daniel needed to improve his English.
- He didn't need to buy expensive textbooks.

E. No obligation – DIDN'T HAVE TO

We use didn't have to + base form to express that someone was not required to do something.

- Daniel didn't have to pay for all his university expenses.

Important: Both didn't need to and didn't have to express a lack of necessity. The context tells us whether the action was actually done or not.

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Exercise 1. Read each sentence and select the correct answer.

1. When I was a child, I _____ help my parents with household chores every weekend.
   a) should have b) had to c) didn't need to
2. You _____ told your boss about the problem earlier. Now it's too late.
   a) should have b) had to c) were supposed to
3. Students _____ use their phones during the final examination. It was strictly prohibited.
   a) didn't have to b) weren't supposed to c) shouldn't have
4. She _____ bought that expensive car. It was a terrible financial decision.
   a) shouldn't have b) didn't need to c) had to

Exercise 2. Use the appropriate past modal or phrasal modal of obligation and the verbs in parentheses.

1. I _____ (study) harder when I was in high school. I regret wasting so much time.
2. My brother _____ (take) care of our grandmother while our parents were traveling.
3. You _____ (not / spend) so much money on that phone. There were cheaper options.
4. We _____ (arrive) at the airport two hours before the flight, according to the airline's instructions.

Exercise 3. Keep the original meaning. Do not change the word provided.

1. It was necessary for Laura to work overtime last week.
   HAD
   Laura _____ last week.
2. It was a bad idea for me to quit my previous job.
   SHOULDN'T
   I _____ my previous job.
3. The students were expected to submit their assignments on Monday, but they didn't.
   SUPPOSED
   The students _____ on Monday.
4. Buying a new computer wasn't necessary because my old one was working perfectly.
   NEED
   I _____ a new computer.

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