

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.

