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Modal verbs are very common and useful in English. We use them to talk about *ability, permission, obligation, requests, offers, suggestions* and *more*. To give suggestions and advice we can use the modal verbs '**could**', '**should**', '**ought to**', '**had better**'.



via

<http://learningglobalenglish.blogspot.com/2014/01/giving-advice-with-could-should-ought.html>

Remember that modal verbs are always followed by a *base form of a verb* – an [infinitive](#) verb without *to*.

Should

'**Should**' is used when the speaker wants to make a *strong suggestion*:

- *The sun is shining bright, so you **should wear** a cap.*
- *You look pale. I don't think you **should go** to school today.*
- *The road is wet. You **shouldn't drive** too fast.*

Should + have

We use **should have** + [past participle](#) to talk about things we regret, when we feel sorry about something that happened or did not happen in the past.

- *I **should have called** you sooner.*
- *I **shouldn't have shouted** at her.*

Ought to

In more formal situations you can use '**ought to**' instead of '*should*', but this modal verb is not used in negative statements and questions:

- *You **ought to (should) wear** a scarf. It's very cold outside.*
- *They **ought to hurry**, their train is leaving.*
- *Jane **ought to visit** that castle, it's great!*

Note: Both '*should*' and '*ought to*' are used to express advice, obligation or duty.

BUT: We use '**should**' when we want to express our *subjective opinion*. In other words, 'what I think is best for you to do'.

- *You **should** call your mother more often.*

'**Ought to**' is used when we want to express an *objective truth*. In other words, 'what is necessary, and cannot be avoided'. That's why we usually use 'ought to' when we are talking about laws, duties and regulations.

- *They ought to follow the school's policy, or they will get expelled.*

Had better

If you want to give an important piece of advice, warning or recommendation (that can have a negative consequence if not followed), use '**had better**':

- *You **had better** (You'd **better**) **leave** for work, it's 8 o'clock already.*
- *We'd **better** go that way, we'll save about 10 minutes.*
- *He'd **better** park his car correctly or he will get fined.*

Note: Had better is a strong expression. We use it if we think there will be *negative results* if someone does not do what is desired or suggested.

Here's how '**had better**' relates to other modal verbs with similar meaning:



<https://d29morwqizybnm.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Slide0235.jpg>

Could

'**Could**' is not as strong as 'should' and is normally used to give *mild advice* or to suggest a *solution* to some problem:

- *- I hate my old jeans!*
- *- Well, you **could buy** a new pair.*
- *If they need more space, they **could look** for a bigger house.*
- *Jack moves to Canada next month. He **could learn** to play hockey there.*

Here's a good video from American English about modal verbs to express advice:

Read more about modal verbs:

[Modal Verbs for Possibility](#)

[Modal Verbs for Deduction](#)

[Modal Verbs for Ability](#)

[Modal Verbs: Permission, Requests and Offers](#)

[Modal Verbs for Obligations: Statements](#)