



Past Modals (could have/should have/must have): Could Have & Would Have: Unrealized Past Possibility and Hypothetical Results Exercises

Fill in the blank with the correct option.

- I had a free afternoon yesterday. I ___ to the museum, the park, or the cinema, but in the end I just relaxed at home.
a) could have gone
b) would have gone
c) must have gone
d) might have gone
- If I had known about the sale, I ___ a new laptop.
a) could have bought
b) would have bought
c) should have bought
d) must have bought
- She was a very fast runner. She ___ the marathon easily, but she never entered one.
a) would have finished
b) must have finished
c) could have finished
d) should have finished
- He offered to lend me money, but I refused. He ___ me £500.
a) could have lent
b) must have lent
c) should have lent
d) would have lent
- We had several options for transport. We ___ a taxi or a bus, but we decided to walk.
a) could have taken
b) must have taken
c) should have taken
d) might have taken
- If she had accepted the job offer, she ___ in New York now.
a) could have lived
b) would be living
c) should have lived
d) must be living
- The package ___ arrived by now. The delivery company said three days, and it's been a week.
a) would have
b) could have
c) should have
d) must have
- I ___ you with your project, but nobody told me you needed help.
a) should have helped
b) could have helped
c) must have helped
d) would have helped
- The job was open to anyone in the company. She ___ for the promotion, but she wasn't interested.
a) could have applied
b) would have applied
c) must have applied
d) should have applied
- She spoke five languages fluently. She ___ as a translator, but she preferred teaching.
a) would have worked
b) could have worked
c) should have worked
d) must have worked



Answers

1. a) could have gone
2. b) would have bought
3. c) could have finished
4. d) would have lent
5. a) could have taken
6. b) would be living
7. c) should have
8. d) would have helped
9. a) could have applied
10. b) could have worked
11. c) would have attended
12. d) could have learned
13. a) wouldn't have come
14. b) couldn't have got
15. c) could have become
16. d) wouldn't have been
17. a) could have taken
18. b) would have made
19. c) couldn't have entered
20. d) would have driven



Explanations

1. “could have gone” (a)

Use 'could have gone' to express an unrealized past possibility — visiting those places was an option, but the speaker chose to stay home. 'Would have gone' requires a condition (e.g., 'if someone had invited me'). 'Must have gone' would mean a deduction that the speaker DID go, which contradicts the context.

2. “would have bought” (b)

Use 'would have + past participle' for the hypothetical result in a third conditional sentence. The speaker didn't know about the sale, so they didn't buy a laptop — but in the imagined situation where they knew, they WOULD have bought one.

3. “could have finished” (c)

Use 'could have finished' to express an unrealized past ability. She had the ability to finish easily, but never entered a marathon, so the ability was never used. 'Would have finished' requires a specific condition, and 'never entering' is a choice, not a conditional scenario.

4. “would have lent” (d)

Use 'would have lent' to describe what someone was willing to do but didn't end up doing because the offer was declined. He was willing and ready — he would have done it if the speaker had accepted.

5. “could have taken” (a)

Use 'could have taken' for an option that was available but not chosen. Taking a taxi or a bus was possible, but they chose to walk. 'Should have taken' would imply criticism of the decision to walk, but there's no regret here.

6. “would be living” (b)

This is a mixed conditional: past condition ('if she had accepted') + present result ('she would be living now'). Use 'would be living' because the result refers to the present moment, not the past. 'Could have lived' would refer to a completed past action.

7. “should have” (c)

Use 'should have arrived' to express an unmet expectation — based on what was promised (three days), the package was expected to arrive, but it hasn't. This is different from regret; it's about something that was expected but didn't happen.

8. “would have helped” (d)

Use 'would have helped' to express willingness in a hypothetical past situation. The speaker is saying: 'If I had known, I would have helped.' The implied condition is not knowing about the need.

9. “could have applied” (a)

Use 'could have applied' to express an unrealized possibility. The opportunity existed (the job was open to anyone), but she chose not to apply. 'Would have applied' needs a condition. 'Should have applied' would criticise her decision.

10. “could have worked” (b)

Use 'could have worked' for unrealized past potential. She had the ability (five languages), so working as a translator was a real possibility, but she chose a different career. 'Should have worked' would imply her choice was wrong.

11. “would have attended” (c)

Use 'would have attended' for the result clause of a third conditional. The condition (better weather) didn't happen, so the result (attending the concert) also didn't happen. This is a hypothetical past scenario.

12. “could have learned” (d)

Use 'could have learned' to express an unrealized past ability. She HAD the ability to learn any language, but she only chose French. The focus is on unused potential.

13. “wouldn't have come” (a)

Use 'wouldn't have come' to express past unwillingness or refusal. Even in the hypothetical situation of begging, he still would have refused. 'Wouldn't have' shows a strong unwillingness. 'Couldn't have come' would mean it was impossible, not that he refused.

14. “couldn't have got” (b)

Use 'couldn't have got' to express past impossibility — getting a table was impossible because the restaurant was fully booked, regardless of arrival time. 'Wouldn't have got' would suggest unwillingness, not impossibility.

15. “could have become” (c)

Use 'could have become' for an unrealized possibility based on past ability. He had the talent (possibility existed), but he chose a different career. 'Should have become' would imply criticism of his choice.

16. “wouldn't have been” (d)

Use 'wouldn't have been' for the hypothetical result of a third conditional. The person didn't tell the truth, so the speaker WAS angry. In the imagined situation (telling the truth), the speaker would NOT have been angry.

17. “could have taken” (a)

Use 'could have taken' to describe an available option that wasn't selected. The scenic road was a possibility, but they chose differently for a practical reason. 'Should have taken' would imply regret, but 'for speed' shows the choice was deliberate and justified.

18. “would have made” (b)

Use 'would have made' for a hypothetical past result. 'Without your advice' is the implied condition (= if you hadn't given me advice). In that scenario, the speaker believes they would have made a terrible decision.

19. “couldn't have entered” (c)

Use 'couldn't have entered' to express past impossibility based on evidence. The locked door proves it was physically impossible for the thief to enter through it. 'Mustn't have entered' is not standard English for past deduction.

20. “would have driven” (d)

Use 'would have driven' to express what someone was willing to do in a past situation that didn't happen. She was willing to drive them, but they declined the offer. The implied meaning is 'she would have done it if we had asked'.