Past Modals (could have/should have/must have): Mixed Past Modals: Comprehensive Review Exercises

Fill in the blank with the correct option.

1. The streets are wet this morning. It ___ during the night.
    a) must have rained
    b) should have rained
    c) would have rained
    d) needn't have rained

2. She didn't come to work today. She ___ feeling well.
    a) must not have been
    b) might not have been
    c) shouldn't have been
    d) wouldn't have been

3. I can't believe you drove in that terrible storm. You ___ an accident!
    a) must have had
    b) should have had
    c) could have had
    d) would have had

4. He invested all his savings in that company and lost everything. He ___ all his money in one place.
    a) needn't have put
    b) couldn't have put
    c) wouldn't have put
    d) shouldn't have put

5. If we had left ten minutes earlier, we ___ the train.
    a) would have caught
    b) could have caught
    c) should have caught
    d) must have caught

6. Someone ___ my sandwich from the fridge. It was there this morning and now it's gone.
    a) should have taken
    b) must have taken
    c) could have taken
    d) would have taken

7. I spent three hours cleaning the house before the guests arrived, but they cancelled at the last minute. I ___ all that time cleaning.
    a) shouldn't have spent
    b) didn't need to spend
    c) needn't have spent
    d) wouldn't have spent

8. He ___ a famous actor, but he chose to teach drama instead.
    a) should have become
    b) must have become
    c) would have become
    d) could have become

9. She ___ the message yet. She only checks her email in the evenings.
    a) might not have read
    b) shouldn't have read
    c) must not have read
    d) couldn't have read

10. The children are covered in mud. They ___ in the garden.
    a) should have been playing
    b) must have been playing
    c) would have been playing
    d) could have been playing

11. You ___ your keys in the car again. Anybody could have stolen it!
    a) mustn't have left
    b) couldn't have left
    c) shouldn't have left
    d) needn't have left

12. Without the scholarship, I ___ to go to university.
   a) couldn't have been able
   b) shouldn't have been able
   c) needn't have been able
   d) wouldn't have been able

13. He passed the exam! He ___ very pleased with himself.
   a) must be
   b) should have been
   c) could have been
   d) would have been

14. The company offered three payment methods. We ___ by credit card, but we chose bank transfer because it was cheaper.
   a) should have paid
   b) could have paid
   c) must have paid
   d) would have paid

15. That ___ the doorbell. I'm not expecting anyone.
   a) mustn't have been
   b) shouldn't have been
   c) can't have been
   d) needn't have been

16. She studied medicine for seven years. It ___ really demanding.
   a) would have been
   b) should have been
   c) could have been
   d) must have been

17. If she had asked me, I ___ her the money without hesitation.
   a) would have given
   b) could have given
   c) should have given
   d) must have given

18. I bought a first-class ticket, but the train was practically empty. I ___ extra for first class.
   a) shouldn't have paid
   b) needn't have paid
   c) didn't need to pay
   d) wouldn't have paid

19. He ran the marathon in 2 hours 45 minutes at age 50. He ___ incredibly fit.
   a) should have been
   b) could have been
   c) must have been
   d) would have been

20. I ___ the cheaper hotel. This expensive one isn't any better!
   a) must have booked
   b) would have booked
   c) could have booked
   d) should have booked

Answers

1. a) must have rained
2. b) might not have been
3. c) could have had
4. d) shouldn't have put
5. a) would have caught
6. b) must have taken
7. c) needn't have spent
8. d) could have become
9. a) might not have read
10. b) must have been playing
11. c) shouldn't have left
12. d) wouldn't have been able
13. a) must be
14. b) could have paid
15. c) can't have been
16. d) must have been
17. a) would have given
18. b) needn't have paid
19. c) must have been
20. d) should have booked

Explanations

1. "must have rained" (a)

Use 'must have rained' for a strong past deduction based on evidence. Wet streets are clear evidence of rain. 'Should have rained' would mean rain was expected but didn't happen (like an unmet forecast). 'Must have' = I'm almost certain this happened.

2. "might not have been" (b)

Use 'might not have been feeling well' for uncertain past speculation. We don't know for sure why she was absent — illness is one possible reason among many. 'Must not have been' would be too strong without clear evidence.

3. "could have had" (c)

Use 'could have had' to express a past possibility that fortunately didn't happen — but it was a real risk. The speaker is highlighting the danger: an accident was possible. 'Must have had' would mean you are certain they DID have an accident.

4. "shouldn't have put" (d)

Use 'shouldn't have put' to criticise a past decision. He DID put all his money in one company, but it was a bad idea. 'Needn't have put' would mean it was unnecessary, not wrong. 'Shouldn't have' carries moral judgement.

5. "would have caught" (a)

Use 'would have caught' for the hypothetical result of a third conditional. In the imagined situation of leaving earlier, catching the train is the expected result. 'Could have caught' would mean it was merely possible, while 'would have' expresses near certainty of the result.

6. "must have taken" (b)

Use 'must have taken' for a strong past deduction. The sandwich was there and now it's gone — someone definitely took it. The evidence is clear. 'Could have taken' would be too weak given the certainty.

7. "needn't have spent" (c)

Use 'needn't have spent' because the speaker DID spend three hours cleaning, but it was unnecessary since the guests cancelled. The effort was wasted. 'Didn't need to spend' would imply they knew about the cancellation before cleaning.

8. "could have become" (d)

Use 'could have become' for an unrealized past possibility. He had the talent and opportunity, but chose a different path. 'Should have become' would criticise his choice. 'Would have become' needs a specific hypothetical condition.

9. "might not have read" (a)

Use 'might not have read' for a speculation that something possibly hasn't happened yet. We know she usually checks email in the evening, so there's a reasonable chance she hasn't read it, but we're not certain.

10. "must have been playing" (b)

Use 'must have been playing' for a strong past deduction about a continuous action. Mud on the children is strong evidence that they were playing in the garden. The continuous form (-ing) emphasises the ongoing nature of the activity.

11. "shouldn't have left" (c)

Use 'shouldn't have left' to criticise a careless past action. The person DID leave their keys in the car, but it was dangerous and irresponsible. 'Needn't have left' would mean it was merely unnecessary, not dangerous.

12. "wouldn't have been able" (d)

Use 'wouldn't have been able' for a hypothetical past result. The implied condition is 'if I hadn't received the scholarship'. Without it, going to university would not have been possible. This is a third conditional pattern.

13. "must be" (a)

Use 'must be' for a present deduction. He passed the exam (a current fact), so we deduce he IS pleased right now. Note this is NOT a past modal — the deduction is about his present state of mind. 'Should have been' would be past criticism.

14. "could have paid" (b)

Use 'could have paid' to express an available option that wasn't chosen. Credit card was a possibility, but they chose bank transfer for a good reason (cheaper). 'Should have paid' would imply regret, but 'because it was cheaper' shows the choice was justified.

15. "can't have been" (c)

Use 'can't have been' to express that something is logically impossible or very unlikely. The speaker isn't expecting anyone, so they deduce it probably wasn't the doorbell. 'Mustn't have been' is not standard for past deduction; use 'can't have been'.

16. "must have been" (d)

Use 'must have been' for a strong deduction about the past. Studying medicine for seven years is clear evidence that it was demanding. 'Would have been' requires a condition. 'Could have been' would be too weak.

17. "would have given" (a)

Use 'would have given' for the result clause of a third conditional. In the hypothetical past situation where she asked, the speaker is certain they would have given the money. 'Could have given' would only express possibility, not willingness.

18. "needn't have paid" (b)

Use 'needn't have paid' because the speaker DID pay extra, but it turned out to be unnecessary since the train was almost empty (standard class would have been fine). 'Didn't need to pay' would imply they knew before buying the ticket.

19. "must have been" (c)

Use 'must have been' for a strong past deduction. Running a marathon in under 3 hours at 50 years old is overwhelming evidence of exceptional fitness. 'Could have been' would be too weak for such strong evidence.

20. "should have booked" (d)

Use 'should have booked' to express regret about a past choice. The speaker chose the expensive hotel but now wishes they had booked the cheaper one, since the quality is the same. 'Would have booked' needs a condition. 'Could have booked' doesn't express the regret.