

Grammar: Modals of Advice: Should, Ought to, Had better

These three verbs are **modal verbs**.

- should
- ought to
- had better

Modal verbs are helping/auxiliary verbs that express ideas like **ability**, **advice**, and **obligation**. Many modal verbs have more than one meaning. They are always followed by the simple form of a verb. For example:

Amanda should go to the doctor.

This shows that we think it is a good idea for Amanda to visit the doctor.

Modals for Advice

English speakers use the modal verbs “**should**,” “**ought to**” and “**had better**” to express that they think something is a good (or a bad) idea. “**Should**” is the most common way to give **advice**.

Look at these examples:

Affirmative	Negative	Question
A: I failed my test. B: Really? You should study harder.	Young children shouldn't watch violent TV shows.	I have a problem. Should I call my parents or my friend?
A: It's really cold outside. B: You ought to wear a warm jacket.	(“ought to” is not usually used in the negative form)	(“ought to” is not common in question form)
A: You had better slow down . You are driving too fast!	You had better not forget to pay your tuition. If you do, the university will kick you out!	(“had better” is not usually used in question form)

These examples have the same basic advice message, but “**had better**” is a bit stronger. It includes the idea of a warning: something bad will happen if you do not follow my advice. For example:

You **had better** do your homework. If you do not do your homework, the teacher will give you a low mark.

In the above examples, you can see that the modals are followed by the simple form of a verb in these patterns.

Subject + modal + basic verb + ... ➡ You should study harder.

~~You should *to* study harder.~~ ➡ **Wrong!**

~~You had better *slowing* down.~~ ➡ **Wrong!**

~~She ought to *to* drink more water.~~ ➡ **Wrong!**

Remember that “ought to” is a modal verb and is followed by a simple verb. The “to” is not an infinitive “to.”

Modal + subject + basic verb + ...?? ➡ Should I call my parents or my friend?

WH- (information) questions can also be formed by putting the WH- question word immediately before the modal.

For example:

What should I do about my problem?

Where should we have dinner tonight?

Why should you believe them?

When should they call their boss?