

# 51 Advice and criticism

## *should, ought to, must, had better*



### 1 Forms

*Must* and *should* are modal verbs (► Unit 46.1): *You should see a doctor.*

We can also use the perfect form *should (not) + have + past participle* (► Unit 48.1):

*We should have (should've) bought it. Should we have left?*

*We should not (shouldn't) have gone.*

*Ought to* and *had better* have this word order:

*I ought to go. I ought not to go.\* Ought I to go?*

*I had better go. I had better not go. Had I better go?\**

\* We don't usually use these forms in spoken English.

**NATURAL ENGLISH** We usually use short forms of *had better* and *should have* in spoken English: *You'd better look at the instruction book. We shouldn't've spent all our money!*

### 2 Advice and warnings

We use *should/shouldn't* and *ought to/ought not to* if we think something is a good or bad idea in general, and to give advice in a particular situation:

*People shouldn't smoke indoors. You look terrible – you ought to see a doctor.*

We usually use *should* to ask for advice:

*Should I ask my boss for a pay rise?*

We can use *must* or *mustn't* to give strong advice and warnings. It is stronger than *should* or *ought to*:

*You must try this cake – it's delicious! I really must lose some weight!*

*We mustn't forget to take our passports. You mustn't swim there, it's dangerous.*

We use *had better (not)* to give advice and warnings in a particular situation.

It usually means 'if you don't do/do this, something bad will happen':

*You'd better check the train times first. (If you don't do this, your journey might be difficult.)*

*That looks hot. You'd better not touch it. (If you touch it, you might get burnt.)*

! We don't use *had better (not)* to give general advice:

*✗ People had better not smoke indoors. ✓ People shouldn't smoke indoors.*

**NATURAL ENGLISH** In conversation, we often use *I (don't) think* and *do you think* with *should/ought to*: *It's expensive. I don't think we should buy it. (= We shouldn't buy it.) Do you think I ought to wear a suit to the interview?*

### 3 Criticism and regrets about the past

We can use *should/shouldn't + have + past participle* to criticise someone's past actions: *You should have done more revision. You shouldn't have bought such a cheap machine!*

We also use *should/shouldn't have + past participle* to express regret for a past action:

*I should have phoned you but I was busy. I shouldn't have shouted at you. I'm sorry.*

! We don't use *must have* or *had better* to express regret or criticism:

*✗ You must have phoned me. ✗ You'd better phoned me. ✓ You should have phoned me.*

🔊 **Pronunciation** ► 1.25