
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The Grammar Gameshow

Should

Will

Hello, and welcome to today's Grammar Gameshow! I'm your host, Will! Run, run as fast as you can, you can't catch me, I'm the Grammar Gameshow man! And of course let's not forget Leslie, our all-knowing voice in the sky.

Leslie

Hello, everyone!

Will

Tonight, we're going to ask you three questions about...

Leslie

'Should'. That handy modal so often used for advice!

Will

OK! Now, let's meet our contestants!

Bill

Hello, all. My name's Bill.

Will

And contestant number two?

Sal

Hello Will! And hello, everyone at home. It's so great to be here tonight! I'm your contestant Sal! Here for your viewing pleasure on the one, the only, the spectacular, Grammar Gameshow!

Will

Well, goodness, Sal. That was quite an intro.

Sal

Isn't he fantastic? Let's give him a hand. Thanks Will. I used to host a game show myself for many years. And what great times they were.

Will

An old hand, eh? Great! OK. Let's get going and don't forget, you can play along at home too. Like many modal verbs, 'should' has a variety of meanings. Explain the use of 'should' in these sentences. 'Should I get the cheap one or the expensive one?'

Bill

Well, that's 'should' to ask for advice or make a suggestion.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

She's out but she shouldn't be much longer.

Sal

That's 'should' for something probable or expected.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

Everyone should wear a seat belt when driving.

Bill

Well, that's 'should' for advice again.

Leslie

Incorrect!

Will

Wow. You got that one spectacularly wrong. Really nose over toes there!

Sal

Isn't he fantastic? But a good TV host should never tell a guest they've got something wrong without softening it first. Just like this. Bill, that was a fair guess, but you got it wrong. Bad luck. But here's a high-five for trying. Boom!

Will

Yes. Thank you Sal. I'll take that one under advisement. Leslie?

Leslie

Good job! Or maybe wrong? I forget now! Anyway, 'should' is a modal verb meaning it doesn't change for person or time, and is always followed by a bare infinitive. It can be used to offer advice and make suggestions, talk about probabilities based on what is expected or logical and refer to obligations - such as, 'Everyone should wear a seat belt when driving' - though it's not as strong as 'must'.

Will

Well done. Two points each. Now it's time to..

Sal

Hold up a sec! What a champion! What poise! What precision! But here's a quick note from someone who's walked the walk before. Why not try it like this. Great play everyone, amazing performance! Two points each!

Will

OK Sal. Nice idea. I'll bear that one in mind. Let's move on to round two. 'Should' is a modal verb and so has no past form. How, then, can we use 'should' in the past?

Bill

Don't we use 'should' plus 'have' plus a past participle verb?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

Well done, Bill. And for a bonus point, what functional use does it have?

Bill

It's used to talk about past actions that either were or weren't a good idea.

Leslie

Correct!

Sal

He got the bonus point! Well done Bill! You're a star! Hit it!

Bill

You shouldn't have done that!

Will

Sal, out of respect for a peer, I am going to let that one slide. But that is your last warning. Leslie?

Leslie

Well done, Bill! We can combine 'should' with 'have' and a past participle to talk about actions that either weren't a good idea or would have been, but didn't happen. This is useful for criticising someone. For example, 'You shouldn't have done that!' Or for talking about regrets. For example, 'I should have listened to my mother more.'

Will

Well done, Bill. You get the bonus point. Hit it! Oh... Well, that one's ruined now! On to

our last round. The verb phrase 'had better' is similar to 'should'. But there are some important differences. Look at these sentences and correct the ones which are wrong.

- A) Both are followed by a bare infinitive.
- B) Both can be used to give advice.
- C) Both are the same degree of intensity.
- D) Neither includes a sense of consequence.

Sal

C) is wrong. 'Had better' is more immediate and urgent than 'should'.

Leslie

Correct!

Bill

I think D) is also incorrect. Doesn't 'had better' include a sense of worry or danger of negative consequence if the advice is not followed?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

Tell them, Leslie.

Sal

Leslie, my best buddy and pal!

Will

My best buddy and pal.

Leslie

Wow folks! What a guy! 'Should' and 'had better' have similar meanings. Both are followed by a bare infinitive, and both can be used to give advice. However, 'had better' is a little more immediate and intense. When we use 'had better', there is an, often unspoken, sense of a negative consequence if the advice is not followed. This also makes 'had better' useful when delivering threats. For example, 'Sal, you had better stop poking that bear with that stick.'

Sal

Isn't he great folks? Let's hear it for your favourite voice in the sky... it's Leslie.

Will

Alright, that's the conjunction that broke the syntax. Bill you win. The prize is a boat or something. And Sal?

Sal

Maybe you should try having a catchphrase. Something like... waaah!

Will

Nope! That's a little too long-winded for me! Release the unsatisfied audience. And Leslie?
Do the goodbye bit.

Leslie

Sawadee ka, Leslie!

Will

There, see you next time!