

The modal verb “could” can be used to offer suggestions. “Could” is not as strong as “should.” It communicates gentle advice.

See also:

Conditional sentences 29 Types of verbs 49

Modal verbs 56

### 59.1 “SHOULD” FOR ADVICE

“Should” is used when the speaker wants to make a strong suggestion.

It’s very sunny. You **should** wear a hat.

“Should” comes before the advice.



#### FURTHER EXAMPLES

It might rain. You **should** take your umbrella with you.



You’re sick. I don’t think you **should** go to work today.



There’s ice on the roads. You **shouldn’t** drive tonight.



Which hat **should** I buy? They’re all so cool.



#### HOW TO FORM

SUBJECT

You

“SHOULD”

**should**

MAIN VERB

**wear**

REST OF SENTENCE

**a hat.**

“Should” is a modal verb, so it stays the same no matter what the subject is.

“Should” is followed by the base form of the main verb.

## 59.2 "OUGHT TO" FOR ADVICE

"Ought to" is a more formal and less common way to say "should."  
It is not usually used in the negative or question forms.



You { **should**  
**ought to** } wear a scarf. It's very cold outside.

## 59.3 "IF I WERE YOU"

English uses "if I were you" to give advice in second conditional sentences. The advice is expressed using "I would."

I don't know if I should take this job.



If I were you, I would take it.

English uses "were," not "was," in this context.

The advice comes after "I would."

## FURTHER EXAMPLES

I'm going to the concert tonight.



If I were you, I'd leave early. The traffic is awful.

The suggestion can come first without changing the meaning.

I think I'll buy this shirt.



I wouldn't buy it if I were you. I don't like the pattern.

There is no comma before "if."

## 59.4 "HAD BETTER"

"Had better" can also be used to give very strong or urgent advice that can have a negative consequence if it is not followed.



{ **You had better**  
**You'd better** } leave for school! It's already 8.45.

## 59.5 "COULD" FOR SUGGESTIONS

"Could" is often used to suggest a solution to a problem. It states a possible course of action without necessarily recommending it.

"Could" means that the action is a possibility; a choice that might solve the problem.

I hate my car!



Well, you **could** get a new one!



### FURTHER EXAMPLES

You **could** study science in college.



We **could** learn English in Canada next year.



If they need more space, they **could** buy a bigger house.



### HOW TO FORM

SUBJECT

You

"COULD"

could

MAIN VERB

get

REST OF SENTENCE


a new car.

"Could" is a modal verb, so it doesn't change with the subject.

The main verb stays in its base form.

## 59.6 "COULD" AND "OR" FOR SUGGESTIONS

When people give suggestions using "could," they often give more than one option to choose from.




Our friends are coming over for dinner, but the oven's broken.

We could make a salad **or** we could order a pizza.

"Or" is used to give an alternative suggestion.

### FURTHER EXAMPLES



I can't decide what to make for dinner tonight.

Well, you could make a curry **or** lasagne.

The modal verb doesn't have to be repeated after "or."



What should I wear to Jan's wedding?

You could wear your new dress **or** a skirt.

If the main verb is the same for both suggestions, it isn't repeated after "or."

## 59.7 MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the most common ways of recommending something or making a suggestion is to use modal verbs.



General suggestion.

You { **could** / **might** } visit the park. It's beautiful.



Stronger suggestion.

You { **should** / **ought to** } visit the castle. It's great.



Very strong suggestion.

You **must** visit the palace. It is beautiful!

### TIP

Emphasis can be added by putting "really" in front of "should," "ought to," and "must."