

Should with perfect infinitive

Should can be used with the perfect infinitive (have + past participle). This structure has several meanings.

Should have + past participle

This structure is used to talk about past events which did not happen.

I should have posted that letter yesterday itself, but I forgot.

She should have knocked at the door before entering the room. (It was necessary but she didn't do it.)

They should have informed his parents that he was unwell. (They didn't inform his parents.)

He should have worked harder. (He didn't work harder.)

She should have made another attempt before quitting.

He should have obtained the necessary permissions before opening the shop.

This structure can also be used to talk about logical possibility.

10 o'clock – he should have reached home.

They should have received our letter.

In most cases, the actual meaning of this structure can be inferred using context.

Should not have + past participle

This structure is used to talk about unwanted things that happened.

You shouldn't have said things like that to her – it really upset her.

She shouldn't have refused that job offer. (= She refused it but it was totally unnecessary.)

He shouldn't have invested all his money in stocks. (= He invested all his money in stocks, but that was a stupid thing to do.)

They shouldn't have bought that used car. (= They bought that used car, but it was not a wise decision.)

We shouldn't have waited for his approval. (= We waited for his approval, but that was not necessary.)