

Using Perfect Infinitives

The structure 'have + past participle' is called a perfect infinitive. Perfect infinitives can have the same kind of meaning as perfect or past tenses.

I am glad to have found my soul mate. (= I am glad that I have found my soul mate.)

She was sorry to have missed the show. (= She was sorry that she had missed the show.)

I hope to have finished the job by next Monday. (= I hope that I will have finished the job by next Monday.)

She seems to have quit the job. (= It seems that she has quit the job.)

Unreal past situations

The perfect infinitive is often used after verbs like mean, be, would like etc., to talk about unreal past situations.

She was to have returned yesterday, but she fell ill.

I meant to have posted the letter, but I forgot. (I did not post the letter.)

After modals

The perfect infinitive is also used after the modal verbs could, might, ought, should, would and needn't to refer to unreal situations.

You should have telephoned – I was getting worried. (The person didn't phone.)

She needn't have come. (She came.)

I would have gone on a vacation if I had had more money. (I didn't go.)

Notes

Note that the structure modal verb + perfect infinitive does not always refer to unreal past conditions. It can also be used to express certainty or possibility.

She should have arrived by now. (=It is possible that she has arrived by now.)