

Konjunktiv II – Past Time with Modal Verbs (Double Infinitive)

The following grammar pertains to actions that:

- would have occurred in the past time (but didn't, so they are expressed in the subjunctive mood)
- contain a modal verb such as *could* or *should* (examples include *should have*, *could have*, *might have*, etc.)

Examples:

- *We could have gone to Leipzig last summer. (but we didn't)* *Wir hätten nach Leipzig fahren können.*
- *You should have seen the movie. (but you didn't)* *Du hättest den Film sehen sollen.*

German uses three verbs in a single sentence to express past time subjunctive with a modal.

- The conjugated verb is always a form of *hätt_* (*hätte*, *hättest*, *hätten*, etc.)
- (The conjugated verb in this construction is always *hätt_* and never *wär_* regardless of the other verbs.)
- The other two verbs appear next to each other at the end of the sentence as infinitives.
- They always appear in the order: *lexical modal*.
- This construction with two infinitives at the end is called the *double infinitive* construction.

Examples:

fore-field	<i>hätt_</i> (conjugated)	sentence field	lexical infinitive	modal infinitive
<i>Wir</i>	<i>hätten</i>	<i>letzten Sommer nach Leipzig</i>	<i>fahren</i>	<i>können</i>
<i>Du</i>	<i>hättest</i>	<i>gestern den Film</i>	<i>sehen</i>	<i>sollen</i>

could have done - Exercises to render into German:

1. I could have eaten the whole cake.
2. If you had called me, we could have gone to the concert.

*Ich hätte den ganzen Kuchen essen können.
Wenn du mich angerufen hättest, hätten wir ins Konzert gehen können.*

• 'should have done'

Note that German makes a difference between weak obligation (*sollen*) and strong obligation (*müssen*). Examples:

- *You should have read the novel. Du hättest den Roman lesen sollen.
(It was interesting, and I think you would have enjoyed it. sollen - weak obligation)*
- *You should have read the novel. Du hättest den Roman lesen müssen.
(You failed the questions on our last exam by not having read the novel. müssen - strong obligation)*

should have done - Exercises to render into German:

3. You should have seen the film. (It was enjoyable, I think you would have liked it.)
4. You should have seen the film. (There will be questions about it on our next test.)
5. I should have repaired my bike. (The bike is still broken and now I have no means of transportation.)

*Du hättest den Film sehen sollen.
Du hättest den Film sehen müssen.
Ich hätte mein Fahrrad reparieren müssen.*

6. I should have repaired my bike. (I had time and it would have been easy to repair.)

7. I should have known that. (Hint: This is strong obligation. For more authentic sounding German, begin with 'das'.)

*Ich hätte mein Fahrrad reparieren sollen.
Das hätte ich wissen müssen.*

• *'should not have done'*

To express the notion of should not have done, use the modal verb *dürfen* plus a negating word such as *nicht* or *nie*. Examples:

*· You shouldn't have seen the film. (Now you're having nightmares.) Du hättest den Film nicht sehen dürfen.
· I should never have said that. (I insulted everyone here.) Das hätte ich nie sagen dürfen.*

should not have done - Exercises to render into German:

8. You shouldn't have said that.

9. We never should have gone to the concert.

*Du hättest das nicht sagen dürfen. Das hättest du nicht sagen dürfen.
Wir hätten nie ins Konzert gehen dürfen.*

• *Word Order Oddities with Double Infinitives*

Even with dependent word order, the double infinitive must remain the final element in the sentence, not the conjugated verb!

	sentence field	hätt_ (conjugated)	lexical infinitive	modal infinitive
	<i>Wenn ich gestern Abend den Film nur</i>	<i>hätte</i>	<i>sehen</i>	<i>können!</i>
<i>Ich wollte dass,</i>	<i>du mich am Wochenende</i>	<i>hättest</i>	<i>besuchen</i>	<i>können.</i>

Examine the examples below and note how the conjugated verb precedes the double infinitive in a subordinate clause (Nebensatz).

*· If only I could have seen the movie last night! Wenn ich den Film gestern Abend nur hätte sehen können!
· I wish that you could have visited me on the weekend. Ich wollte, dass du mich am Wochenende hättest besuchen können.*

Dependent Word Order with Double Infinitives (Doppelinfininitiv im Nebensatz) - Exercises to render into German:

10. If I could have gone to the concert last night, I would have called you.

11. Now I believe that I should never have said that to you.

12. Do you know if you could have gone to Moscow?

*Wenn ich gestern Abend ins Konzert hätte gehen können, hätte ich dich angerufen.
Jetzt glaube ich, dass ich das dir nie hätte sagen dürfen.
Weißt du, ob du nach Moskau hättest fahren können? (...hättest fahren dürfen?)*