



Semi-modal verb **OUGHT TO**

The semi-modal verbs (or marginal modals) are: dare, need, used to and ought to. They behave similarly to modal verbs but also share some characteristics with main verbs. For example, unlike modal verbs, some semi-modal verbs are followed by to, but like modal verbs, they do not change form for person.

Ought to does not have a past form. It is only used with reference to the present and the future.

AFFIRMATIVE : Ought to comes first in the verb phrase (after the subject and before another verb):

Ought to is used to express an obligation or an expectation that someone should do something.

- We ought to do more exercise. / I ought to phone my parents. / It ought to be easy now.

Ought to is also used to express the likelihood of something happening.

- There ought to be some good films at the cinema this weekend. / The journey ought to take about 2 hours.

NEGATIVE : Ought not to or oughtn't to. Negatives are formed without 'do'.

- You ought not to be here / He oughtn't to do that. / You ought not to worry about it.

The negative of ought to is not common. We usually use shouldn't or should not instead:

- You shouldn't be so selfish. (preferred to You oughtn't to be so selfish)

QUESTIONS : Questions are also formed without 'do'.

- Ought we to be more worried about the environment?
- Ought we not to reconsider the whole matter?

The question form of ought to is not very common. It is very formal. We usually use should instead.

OUGHT TO + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE : used to express regret that someone did not do the right thing in the past

- I ought to have spoken up earlier. I'm sorry. / I know I ought not to have taken the money.
- You ought to have offered to help. / You ought to have listened to the warnings.