

# Had Better vs. Should: Strong Advice & Urgency

INTERMEDIATE

**Focus: Advisable actions, Negative form 'had better not', Potential consequences and danger, Specific vs general situations, Degrees of urgency, Giving opinions**

In English, we use both **should** and **had better** to give advice, but they have different meanings and levels of urgency.

## 1. Should: General Advice and Opinions

We use **should** to say that something is a good idea or the right thing to do. There is no sense of danger or threat.

- **Structure:** Subject + should + verb (base form)
- **Usage:** General advice, opinions, or checking if something is a good idea.
  - *Example:* "You **should** see that movie; it's very funny." (It's a good idea).
  - *Example:* "I don't think you **should** work so hard." (Opinion).

## 2. Had Better: Specific Situations and Urgency

We use **had better** for **strong advice** in specific situations. It implies urgency, a warning, or a threat. It means: "If you don't do this, something bad will happen."

- **Structure:** Subject + had better + verb (base form)
  - *Note:* We often contract "had" to 'd (e.g., *You'd better go*).
- **Usage:** Immediate future, specific situations, warning of consequences (danger, trouble, missing a train, etc.).
  - *Example:* "The train leaves in ten minutes. We **had better** leave now." (Consequence: We will miss the train).
  - *Example:* "You **had better** slow down; there is a police car ahead." (Consequence: You will get a ticket).

## 3. The Negative Form: Had Better NOT

Be careful with the word order. "Not" goes **after** "better".

- **Correct:** "You **had better not** be late."
- **Incorrect:** ~~You hadn't better be late.~~

## Summary of Differences

Feature	Should	Had Better
Tone	Neutral / Friendly suggestion	Strong / Urgent / Warning
Consequence	None / Mild	<b>Bad result</b> (danger, problem, anger)
Context	General or Specific	Only <b>Specific</b> situations
Time	General time	Immediate future (Not past!)

# Practice Exercises

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## Instructions:

Complete the sentences using **should**, **shouldn't**, **had better**, or **had better not** combined with the verb in parentheses.

### Guideline:

- Use **had better / had better not** if there is a **danger, warning, or bad consequence** implied.
- Use **should / shouldn't** for **general opinions** or polite suggestions.
- Pay attention to the (not/verb) cues for negatives.

1. It is raining heavily outside. You \_\_\_\_\_ (take) an umbrella, or you will get soaked completely.
2. I think people \_\_\_\_\_ (recycle) more paper to help the environment.
3. The boss is in a terrible mood today. You \_\_\_\_\_ (not/ask) for a raise right now; he might fire you!
4. You look tired. I think you \_\_\_\_\_ (go) to bed a little earlier tonight.
5. We \_\_\_\_\_ (not/forget) to pay the electricity bill by tomorrow, or they will cut off our power.
6. Do you think I \_\_\_\_\_ (apply) for this job? It looks interesting, but the pay is low.
7. Your cough sounds terrible. You \_\_\_\_\_ (see) a doctor before it turns into pneumonia.
8. Children \_\_\_\_\_ (not/eat) too much candy because it is bad for their teeth.
9. "That dog looks aggressive." "Yes, you \_\_\_\_\_ (not/touch) it; it might bite you."
10. If you want to visit London, you \_\_\_\_\_ (go) in the spring. The weather is beautiful then.
11. We are almost out of gas on the highway! We \_\_\_\_\_ (find) a gas station immediately.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ (I/invite) Mark to the party? I know you two don't get along well.
13. You \_\_\_\_\_ (not/park) here. The sign says "Tow Away Zone," and your car will be gone when you return.
14. Generally, I believe students \_\_\_\_\_ (read) more books instead of just watching videos.
15. The movie starts in five minutes and there is a long line. We \_\_\_\_\_ (hurry) if we want to get tickets.

## Answer Key

1. **had better take** (Consequence: getting soaked)
2. **should recycle** (General opinion/good idea)
3. **had better not ask** (Consequence: might get fired/trouble)
4. **should go** (Friendly suggestion)
5. **had better not forget** (Consequence: cut off power)
6. **should apply** (Asking for an opinion)
7. **had better see** (Consequence: serious illness)
8. **shouldn't eat / should not eat** (General advice)
9. **had better not touch** (Consequence: biting/danger)
10. **should go** (Suggestion/Opinion)
11. **had better find** (Urgency: running out of gas)
12. **Should I invite** (Asking for opinion - *Note: 'Had I better' is possible but rare/very formal; 'Should' is standard for questions*)
13. **had better not park** (Consequence: car towed)
14. **should read** (General belief)
15. **had better hurry** (Urgency: missing the movie)