

B2 -

Sliding doors moments — Life-changing decisions

Reflect on life-altering decisions using modals of speculation and past possibility: '*might have*', '*could have*', and '*should have*'

Warm-up — Life's turning points

1. Have you ever made a decision that changed your life?
2. What might have happened if you chose differently?

How would you describe the picture on the left? (Use your imagination to build a narrative.)



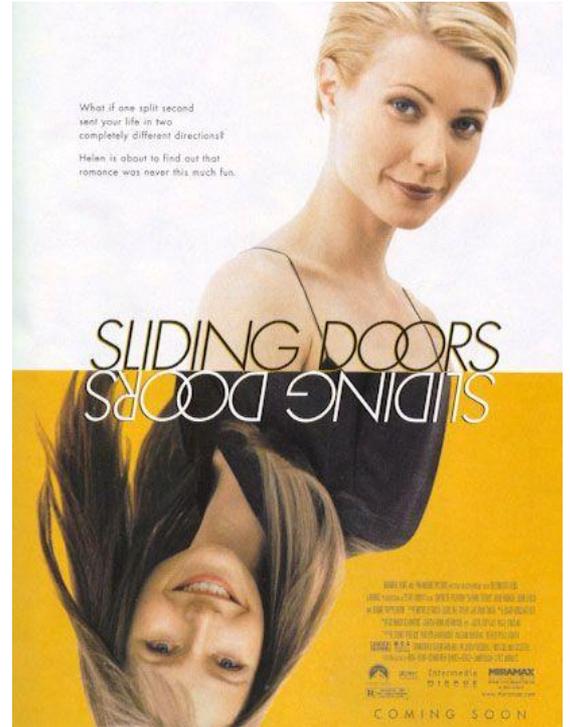
What does '*sliding doors moments*' mean?



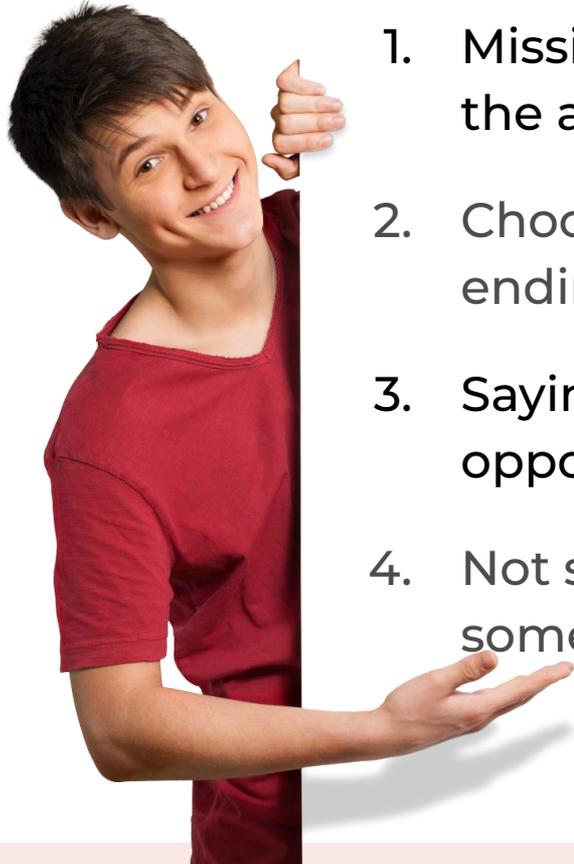
'Sliding doors moments' meaning

A '*sliding doors moment*' refers to a small, seemingly minor decision or event that ends up having a major impact on the direction of your life — like a fork in the road where you life could have gone in a completely different direction.

Origin: The phrase comes from the 1998 film **Sliding Doors** starring Gwyneth Paltrow. In the movie, the main character's life splits into two parallel timelines based on whether or not she catches a train. The film shows how one tiny moment can lead to two entirely different futures.



Examples of sliding door moments:



1. Missing a flight and meeting your future partner at the airport instead.
2. Choosing to study one subject instead of another and ending up in a different career.
3. Saying yes to a coffee date that leads to a business opportunity.
4. Not sending a message... and never reconnecting with someone again.

In short ...

... sliding doors moments are the '*what if*' point in life — the little moments that *might have*, *could have*, or *should have* changed everything.

Perfect for speculative language and reflective storytelling, especially with modals like:

1. I *might have* become a teacher ...
2. We *could have* moved abroad ...
3. She *should have* taken the chance ...

The Missed Train

Sophie stood on the train platform, clutching her coffee cup and checking her phone every few seconds. She was supposed to be on the 7:15 train to Cape Town for a job interview — an opportunity that could have changed her life. But between a late alarm, a missed bus, and spilling coffee on her blouse, the morning had turned into chaos. As the train pulled away without her, she stood frozen, watching it disappear into the distance.

At first, she panicked. This job at a major finance firm had seemed like the fresh start she needed. Her parents had even said she should have moved on from their small town years ago. She'd rehearsed her answers, printed her CV, and imagined a new life filled with office towers, promotions, and expensive coffee. But now, that door seemed firmly shut.

Back home, Sophie spent the afternoon trying to reschedule, but the company told her the position had already been filled.

That night, she sat on her porch, reflecting. “I might have nailed that interview,” she whispered.

“I could have been living in Cape Town by next month.” But instead of wallowing, she started to wonder: What if missing the train was actually a sign?

Three months later, Sophie opened her own online bookkeeping service. It started slow, but with time and passion, her client base grew. She might not have succeeded in the corporate world after all, she often mused. “Who knows? I could have ended up miserable in a cubicle.” Now, she works from home, sets her own schedule, and even teaches financial literacy to local teens on weekends.

She still thinks about that missed train sometimes. But instead of regret, she feels something else — peace. “Maybe I should have missed that train,” she smiles.

Comprehension questions

1. Why was Sophie going to Cape Town originally?
2. What went wrong on the morning of her trip?
3. Why couldn't she reschedule the interview?
4. How did Sophie react after missing the train?
5. What decision did she make instead?
6. How does she feel about the situation now?



Modals for past possibility and speculation

‘Might have’, ‘could have’, and ‘should have’

General structure: [modal] + have + past participle

Used to talk about:

1. Past possibilities.
2. Missed opportunities.
3. Regrets or advice in hindsight.
4. Speculations about what could’ve happened differently.

Structures

| Might have | | |
|---|---|--|
| Positive | Might have + past participle | <i>She might have missed the call.</i> |
| Negative | Might not have + past participle | <i>He might not have seen the message.</i> |
| Question | Might + subject + have + past participle | <i>Might she have forgotten the time?</i> |
| Use for unsure speculation about the past. | | |
| Could have | | |
| Positive | Could have + past participle | <i>I could have gone to university abroad.</i> |
| Negative | Could not have + past participle | <i>She could not have known the result.</i> |
| Question | Could + subject + have + past participle | <i>Could they have arrived early?</i> |
| Use for past ability or possibility (real or imagined). | | |
| Should have | | |
| Positive | Should have + past participle | <i>You should have studied more.</i> |
| Negative | Should not have + past participle | <i>They should not have lied to her.</i> |
| Question | Should + subject + have + past participle | <i>Should I have told him the truth?</i> |
| Use for advice, expectations, or regrets in the past. | | |

Quick comparison table

| Modal | Meaning | Example |
|--------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Might have | Past possibility (uncertain). | He might have taken the wrong train. |
| Could have | Past ability or opportunity (real or unrealised). | We could have won the game. |
| Should have | Advice or regret in hindsight. | You should have arrived earlier. |



Sentence completion activity

1. I _____ (accept) the job offer, but I didn't feel ready.
2. She _____ (catch) the bus if she hadn't overslept.
3. We _____ (talk) to him before he left.
4. They _____ (tell) us about the delay sooner.
5. You _____ (get) hurt if you hadn't worn your helmet.
6. He _____ (take) the wrong train — that's why he's late.
7. I _____ (listen) to your advice, but I was too stubborn.
8. We _____ (miss) the entire movie if we hadn't booked in advance.
9. She _____ (be) happier if she had followed her dream.
10. They _____ (win) the match if they had practised more.
11. You _____ (mention) it earlier — I didn't know you needed help!



Speaking activity — Sliding door roleplay

In pairs, choose a scenario (e.g., missed flight, last-minute decision, chance encounter, ...)

Task:

1. Discuss what happened.
2. Speculate on what might have, could have, or should have happened.

Example prompt: You decided not to move to another country. Discuss how your life might have changed if you have gone.

Error correct activity

Instructions: Each of the following sentences contains one grammar error related to modals of past possibility. Find and correct the mistake.

1. She might has taken the job if she'd been more confident.
2. I should told him how I really felt before he moved.
3. They could of missed the meeting if the taxi hadn't arrived.
4. You should of studied Business instead of Art.
5. He might been successful if he'd accepted the scholarship.
6. We should had left earlier to avoid the traffic.
7. I could have to gone with them if I'd packed faster.
8. She might've been changed her mind after the phone call.
9. They should have listen to the warning signs.
10. He could have saw the email, but he ignored it.





Thank you for your support.

YouTube: @elucidatedenglish