

Word for Word

Should you have used *would have* or *would of*?



The phrase *would of* is sometimes erroneously used in place of *would have* because the pronunciation of *would of* is similar to that of *would've*, the contraction of *would have*. Also, contractions such as *would've* and *should've* are sometimes intentionally misspelled as *would of* and *should of* (or *woulda* and *shoulda*) to depict regional accents,¹ but neither contractions nor intentional misspellings should be used in formal or scientific writing.

Would, *should*, *could*, and *might* are examples of modal verbs that can be combined with the auxiliary verb *have* to help form the conditional perfect tense of a third verb.² The preposition *of* should not be used in place of the auxiliary verb *have* in any of these verb phrases.

Examples:

The surgeon would have performed the operation sooner had an operating room been available.

We could have removed the tumor surgically if it had been detected sooner.

The author should have reported the conflict of interest.

References

1. Dreyer B. *Dreyer's English*. Random House; 2019:13.
2. NC State Graduate Writing Center. Conditional Phrases + Modals. Accessed September 12, 2022.
<https://fsl.dasa.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2018/01/Conditional-Phrases-and-Modals.pdf>

— Bryan Tutt

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