

Had better: strong advice

CEFR B1 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

A fixed phrase for strong advice: had better + base verb, had better not for warnings, and no to after better.

The rule

The form: had better + base verb

- Had better takes the base verb with no to: "You had better rest."
- The subject does not change the form: I had better, he had better, we had better.
- The contraction is common in speech: "You'd better hurry."
- Had better is fixed. "Have better" and "would better" are wrong.

The meaning: strong advice or a warning

- Had better is stronger than should. It suggests that something bad may happen otherwise.
- "You had better take an umbrella" warns about the rain.
- It often appears in urgent situations: "We had better leave now or we will miss the train."
- The tone can sound direct or bossy, so friends soften it with "I think" or a smile.

The negative: had better not

- The negative puts not after better: "You had better not be late."
- The contraction is "You'd better not".
- The meaning is a warning against an action: "She had better not tell him."
- Do not use do not after had better: "You do not better go" is wrong.

Had better and the past

- Had better talks about the present or the future, even though it contains had.
- "I had better go" means I should go now or soon.
- For the past, use should have done: "I should have gone earlier", not "I had better have gone".
- The perfect form "had better have done" exists in some dialects, but should have is the safe choice for learners.

Had better or should?

- Should gives advice: "You should rest." It leaves the choice open.
- Had better gives strong advice with a warning: "You had better rest, or you will get worse."
- Use had better when the consequence matters and time is short.
- Use should for general recommendations and polite suggestions.

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. You ___ see a doctor about that pain.

2. We had better ___ now or we will miss the bus.

3. She had ___ not be late again.

4. I had better ___ this report tonight.

5. You had better ___ a jacket; it is freezing.

6. He had better ___ to the meeting on time.

7. For the past, I should ___ gone earlier.

8. They had better ___ the tickets today.

9. You had better not ___ him the secret.

10. We ___ better check the address before we leave.

11. I had better ___ my phone before the trip.

12. She had better ___ the truth to her parents.

13. Had better means ___ advice than should.

14. You had better ___ that wire; it is live.

15. He ___ better not forget his passport.

16. We had better ___ a taxi if the rain continues.

17. I had better ___ going; it is late.

18. You had better ___ your homework before dinner.

19. The phrase had better does not describe ___.

20. She had better not ___ the bus again.

Answer key

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1. **had better** — The fixed advice phrase is had better + base verb.
2. **leave** — Had better takes the bare verb with no to.
3. **better** — The negative form is had better not.
4. **finish** — The bare verb follows had better.
5. **take** — Take is the base verb after had better.
6. **come** — Had better takes the base verb come, not a to-infinitive.
7. **have** — Advice about the past uses should have + past participle.
8. **book** — The base verb follows had better for every subject.
9. **tell** — After had better not, the base verb stays bare.
10. **had** — The fixed phrase is had better, and it stays the same for every subject.
11. **charge** — Had better is followed by the base verb.
12. **tell** — The bare verb tell follows had better.
13. **stronger** — Had better gives stronger advice with a warning.
14. **not touch** — The negative is had better not + base verb.
15. **had** — The phrase stays had better with he.
16. **take** — The base verb follows had better.
17. **be** — The base verb be follows had better.
18. **finish** — Had better takes the bare verb finish.
19. **the past** — Had better points to the present or future; the past needs should have done.
20. **miss** — After had better not, the base verb miss stays bare.