

SUPPOSE BE SUPPOSED TO SUPPOSEDLY

SUPPOSE

- A: Are you going to dinner with that client?
B: **I suppose so.** I'd really rather meet earlier, but he couldn't make it any sooner.
- X: Bill called, but he didn't leave a message.
Y: **What do you suppose** he wanted?
X: **I suppose** he wanted to know the status of that dispute. He's very interested in settling.

Form

Suppose is a regular verb. The final e is silent. The final s is pronounced like a z. Stress the second syllable, and say: *sup-poz*.

Suppose is almost always used in the **present tense**.
The clause that *follows* can be in any tense.

- I suppose he'll call.
- I suppose he calls there every day.
- I suppose he called.
- I suppose he had called before coming.
- I suppose he can call from his car.

Suppose is typically used in the **first person** (I/we):

We suppose they're reviewing the proposal right now.

or in the **question** (second person) - **you**:

What do you suppose he meant by that?

Suppose is followed by two possibilities:

- I suppose so. (fixed expression) ¹
- I suppose (that) ... followed by a *clause* ² (see second example) ³

Function

Suppose is used to mean *imagine*, *assume*, or *deduce*.

¹ See first example on the top of the page – conversation between **A** and **B**.

² Subject + verb

³ Conversation between **X** and **Y** on the top of this page.

BE SUPPOSED TO

- A: Would you like to play tennis on Saturday?
 B: I'd love to, but I'm **supposed to** take my kids to the dentist.
- X: Where's Diane? I thought she was coming with us.
 Y: **She was supposed to**, but she got tied up with a filing at the last minute.

The police **are not supposed to** stop or question likely suspects outside their jurisdiction.⁴
 Of course, sometimes they do it, anyway.

Form

BE supposed to is a kind of **modal** auxiliary. It describes **duty** or **obligation**.

The *e* is silent. The second *s* is pronounced like *z*. Stress the second syllable.
 To **pronounce** *supposed* correctly, do not add "ed" -- do not say "suppos-ed".
 Instead, remember that the *e* is silent, and **attach** the **d** sound to the **z** sound in one breath:
suppoz.d.

The **time** of **BE supposed to** is expressed in **BE**. *Supposed* is invariable (never changes).

I'm supposed to leave soon.
 We're supposed to. . . .
 He's supposed to. . . .
 John and Mary are supposed to. . . .
 I was supposed to. . . .
 They weren't supposed to. . . .

Like all modal verbs, **BE supposed to** is followed by a **simple verb**.

Function

BE supposed to is very **similar** to *should* in meaning.
 Like *should*, you can use **BE supposed to** express social or moral **duty** or **obligation** to act.
 The difference between the two is as follows:

Should is concentrated in the **subject**.

I *should* call him today.
 Tom *should* let me know what he's decided.
 They *shouldn't* spend all their money.

The above three actions (call, let know, and spend) are the **duties** or **obligations** of *I*, *Tom*, and *they*.

⁴ The exception to this rule is the "hot pursuit" rule.

BE supposed to is concerned with the *subject* **and** with *any/all other people affected by the action*.

Use **BE supposed to** when implying a **promise** or an **agreement**, to behave in a certain way.

For example:

I'm supposed to call him today.
(Indicates that I promised I would.)

Tom *is supposed to* let me know what he's decided.
(He and I agreed that he would let me know.)

They're *not supposed to* spend all their money.
(Indicates that they have promised not to spend it, or have been told not to do so.)

The same similarities and differences exist between functions of these modals in the past:

Henry *should have finished* this job yesterday.
Henry *was supposed to finish* this job yesterday.

In both the above examples, **Henry did not finish**. The second example places more stress on the broken agreement.

We *weren't supposed to promise* them anything.
We *shouldn't have promised* them anything.

In both instances above, **we did promise** them; we did the wrong thing.

- In the first example, we had been told **not** to promise them anything.
- In the second example, we are expressing our regret at having promised them.

USAGE notes for ATTORNEYS

(1) Use **should** when making legal arguments.⁵ For example:

"This court should find my client not liable due to defendant's failure to prove any of his allegations."

"The client should not proceed with this transaction until we get a no-action letter from the SEC."

Note - **You cannot use "BE supposed to" in this way.**

(2) Unlike *should*, *must*, and *may*, "**BE supposed to**" does **not** have a **clear status** in terms of legally binding consequences.⁶ If you are not sure whether the other side's lawyers are discussing legally binding conduct – ASK!!

⁵ Remember that *should* cannot express legal duty to act or refrain from acting. You *can* use *should*, however, to argue for a change in the law, or to argue for a preferred legal decision.

⁶ *Must* commands or requires conduct. Non-conformity, therefore, will have legal consequences. *May* authorizes or allows action. The government may not deny the party involved the right to engage in the authorized conduct without due process of law. Finally, *should* has no legal force. All three are clear, therefore, in relationship to the law (*may* and *must* **bind**; *should* does not.)

GRAMMAR NOTE:

The **past form** of **BE supposed to -- was/were supposed to + simple verb**

I **was supposed to** arrive at 3:00.
They weren't supposed to say anything.

The **past form** of **should -- should have + past participle**

I should have arrived at 3:00.
They shouldn't have said anything.

SUPPOSEDLY

The adverb **supposedly** has its own, distinct meaning. It means *allegedly*.

- Whereas *allegedly* is a “trade term” used exclusively by lawyers, supposedly can be used in any setting or situation.

For example:

A: Is Elizabeth going to help us?
B: Supposedly.

When B answers A using “*supposedly*,” he is *conveying two messages*, not one:

1. Elizabeth promised to help.
2. B doubts that Elizabeth will keep her promise.

Another example:

X: Why didn't Mike get the brief written last night?
Y: His wife called around 6:00 p.m. Supposedly their son was sick and he needed to take him to the hospital.

In response to X's question, Y is conveying the following messages:

1. Mike's wife called around 6:00 p.m. [no doubt – simple statement of fact]
2. Mike's wife told Y that their son was sick and that Mike had to leave the office and take the kid to the hospital. [a re-statement of Mike's wife's words to Y]
3. Y doesn't really believe Mike's story.

Pronunciation Note:

The adverb *supposedly* is pronounced differently from *suppose* and *supposed*. There is an extra syllable in *supposedly*.

You need to pronounce the syllable *supposedly*.
You still stress the second syllable, and say the s like z – *sup-poz-ed-ly*.

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Exercises

Directions: Convert the following sentences from *should* to the appropriate ***BE supposed to*** form.

For Example:

They shouldn't drive downtown. Parking is outrageously expensive in the loop.
They're not supposed to drive downtown.

1. He should keep us posted on any changes.
2. I should let them know something one way or another.
3. They should have discussed the details with their partners.
4. He shouldn't have given new associates so much responsibility.
5. You should have contacted me when you heard from them.
6. I recently subscribed to *Time* magazine. I should be getting my first issue some time this week.

Directions: Convert the following sentences from ***BE supposed to*** to ***should***.

1. She's supposed to get back to me later on today.
2. He's not supposed to discuss these issues with anyone outside the office.
3. John was supposed to be here an hour ago.
4. We weren't supposed to tell him anything.
5. My paralegal is supposed to have everything filed by 3:00 today.
6. I was supposed to give them my feedback yesterday.

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Answers to Exercises

Directions: Convert the following sentences from *should* to the appropriate *BE supposed to* form.

1. He should keep us posted on any changes.
He's supposed to keep us posted on any changes.

2. I should let them know something one way or another.
I'm supposed to let them know something one way or another.

3. They should have discussed the details with their partners.
They were supposed to discuss the details with their partners.

4. He shouldn't have given new associates so much responsibility.
He was not supposed to give new associates so much responsibility.

5. You should have contacted me when you heard from them.
You were supposed to contact me when you heard from them.

6. I should be getting my first issue some time this week.
I'm supposed to be getting (I'm supposed to get) my first issue some time this week.

Directions: Convert the following sentences from *BE supposed to* to *should*.

1. She's supposed to get back to me later on today.
She should get back to me later on today.
2. He's not supposed to discuss these issues with anyone outside the office.
He shouldn't discuss these issues with anyone outside the office.
3. John was supposed to be here an hour ago.
John should have been here an hour ago.
4. We weren't supposed to tell him anything.
We shouldn't have told him anything.
5. My paralegal is supposed to have everything filed by 3:00 today.
My paralegal should have everything filed by 3:00 today.
6. I was supposed to give them my feedback yesterday.
I should have given them my feedback yesterday.