

# had better

## meaning

We use *had better* to give strong advice, or to tell people what to do (including ourselves).

*You'd better turn that music down before your Dad gets angry.*

*It's seven o'clock. I'd better put the meat in the oven.*

*Had better* refers to the immediate future. It is more urgent than *should* or *ought*. Compare:

*I really ought to go and see Fred one of these days. ~ Well, you'd better do it soon - he's leaving for South Africa at the end of the month.*

*Had better* is not used in polite requests. Compare:

*Could you help me, if you've got time?* (request)

*You'd better help me. If you don't, there'll be trouble.* (order/threat)

Note that *had better* does not usually suggest that the action recommended would be better than another one that is being considered - there is no idea of comparison. The structure means 'It would be good to ...', not 'It would be better to ...'.

## forms

*Had better* refers to the immediate future, but the form is always past (*have better* is impossible). After *had better* we use the infinitive without *to*.

*It's late - you had better hurry up.*

(NOT ... ~~you have better~~ ...)

(NOT ... ~~you had better hurrying / to hurry~~ ...)

We normally make the negative with *had better not* + infinitive.

*You'd better not wake me up when you come in.*

(*You hadn't better wake me ...* is possible but very unusual.)

A negative interrogative form *Hadn't ... better ...?* is possible.

*Hadn't we better tell him the truth?*

Normal unemphatic short answer forms are as follows:

*Shall I put my clothes away? ~ You'd better!*

*He says he won't tell anybody. ~ He'd better not.*

*Had* is sometimes dropped in very informal speech.

*You better go now. I better try again later.*