

JCGL

Swan, M. (2005) *Practical English Usage*, 3rd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## MODAL IDIOMS

### HAD BETTER / WOULD RATHER

This category of verbs expresses modal or aspectual meaning. They are intermediate between auxiliaries and main verbs.

*You had (You'd) better hurry* = I advise you to do this.

*I would (I'd) rather take my time* = I prefer to do this.

### WOULD RATHER

- This expression is followed by the infinitive without *to*.
- We can also use the structure *would rather* + subject + past tense:

*I'd rather you went home now.*

*My wife would rather we didn't see each other any more.*

- A present tense is sometimes used in this structure (e.g. *I'd rather you go home now*), but this is unusual.
- To talk about past actions, a past perfect tense is possible:

*I'd rather you hadn't done that.*

However, it is more common to express this kind of idea with *I wish*:

*I wish you hadn't done that.*

## EXERCISE

In each of the following sentences insert either **had better** or **would rather** as appropriate.

1. We ..... play chess than bridge.
2. You ..... hurry up. It is early closing day today.
3. There are stinging nettles either side of the path. We ..... be careful.
4. .... you ..... have rice pudding or cherry tart?
5. He ..... not start the engine until he knows how to use it.
6. Would you prefer to visit Kew Gardens or Hampton Court Palace? I  
..... see Kew Gardens today.