

German 'soll / sollte' vs. English 'should' When they match — when they don't!

COLOUR LEGEND

-  Same meaning & use in both languages
 -  Partially overlapping meaning (nuance needed)
 -  No direct "should" equivalent — use other English form
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Advice / Personal Recommendation

Du solltest früher schlafen. → *You should go to bed earlier.*
Du hättest anrufen sollen. → *You should have called.*

(Personal advice; matches *should* exactly)

Conditional (formal)

Sollte es regnen, bleiben wir zu Hause. → *Should it rain, we'll stay home.* (formal inversion; matches directly in meaning & style)

Asking for Advice / Offering

*Soll ich...?** → *Should I...?*
→ *Shall I... ?* British English formal/polite
→ *Do you want me to...?* Global neutral

Soll ich das Fenster öffnen? → *Should I open the window?*
→ *Shall I open the window?*
→ *Do you want me to open the window?*

Schedule / Plan

Der Zug soll um 10 ankommen. → *The train is due/scheduled/meant to arrive at 10.* (official plan)

→ *The train should arrive at 10.* (We think, but it's not guaranteed).

Duty / External Obligation (NOT 'should')

Ich soll den Bericht bis Freitag abgeben. → *I'm supposed to hand in the report...* (rule from boss, trainer...)

Ich soll nicht darüber sprechen. → *I'm not supposed to talk about it.*

Reported Info / Rumour (NOT 'should')

Er soll kündigen. → *He is said to be resigning./ Apparently he's resigning.*

Es soll morgen regnen. → *Apparently it will rain tomorrow.*

SUMMARY TABLE

Function	German form	Common English form(s)	'Should' overlap?
Advice	sollte	should	Yes
Past advice	hätte ... sollen	should have	Yes
Conditional (formal)	sollte (if-case)	should (formal inversion)	Yes
Asking advice/ offering	Soll ich...?	Should I...?/Shall I...?/Do you want me...?	Yes
Schedule / plan	soll	is due / scheduled to / should	Partial
External duty	soll	be supposed to / must	No
Reported info	soll	reportedly / is said to / apparently	No