

Language at work

GRAMMAR REFERENCE

Verbs of obligation, prohibition and permission

Form

Verbs of obligation, prohibition and permission (e.g. *must*, *have to*, *can't*, *can*) come before the main verb.

Customers **must pay** for the product within 30 days.

Do I **have to** check out before 12.00?

We **can't take** our phones into meetings.

You **can make** short personal calls at work.

Use

- 1 Use *must*, *have to*, *need to* for talking about obligations (e.g. rules) and necessity.
You **must** wear your uniform during working hours.
They **have to** start work at three.
She **needs to** update her password by the end of the week.
- 2 Use *don't have to*, *don't need to* when there is no obligation or necessity to do something.
Employees **don't have to** wear an ID badge.
With flexitime, **no one needs to** start or end at a fixed time of day.
- 3 Use *mustn't*, *can't*, *(be) not allowed to* for prohibition (stopping somebody from doing something).
You **mustn't** leave the designated area.
Employees **can't** use the Internet during work time for personal use.
Visitors **are not allowed to** enter this area of the building without a pass.
- 4 Use *can*, *(be) allowed to* for talking about and asking for permission.
We **can** make personal calls from our workstations at lunchtimes.
You're **allowed to** bring your mobile phone into the lab.
Am I allowed to log in to the server from home?
- 5 *Must* has no past form. Use *had to* instead.
They **must** sign in at reception. (Present)
He **had to** show his passport at the security desk. (Past)
- 6 With question forms about rules, use *Do I have to ...?* or *Do I need to ...?* We rarely use *must* to ask about rules.
Does he have to lock up every day?
Do I need to ask for permission to leave early?

- 1 Underline the correct verbs in *italics* to complete the sentences. In two sentences both verbs are correct.

- 1 You *need to* / *are allowed to* get a parking permit if you want to use the car park.
- 2 Employees *mustn't* / *have to* attend at least three training days per year to receive a certificate.
- 3 She *doesn't have to* / *can't* work with us if she doesn't want to. I just thought she might like to.
- 4 *Can I* / *Am I allowed to* call my family on this phone?
- 5 You *mustn't* / *don't have to* drink the water from this tap. It's only for washing hands.
- 6 The room over there is for having a coffee and taking a break. Anyone *can* / *needs to* use it.
- 7 You *aren't allowed to* / *mustn't* smoke anywhere on the premises. Go outside if you need a cigarette.
- 8 Do we *have to* / *must* wait outside until the security guard arrives with the key?

- 2 Rewrite the sentences starting with the words given. Use *must*, *have to*, *need to*, etc.

- 1 My job is to welcome guests and answer the phone.
I have to welcome guests and answer the phone.
- 2 It isn't necessary to bring your laptop – we have one you can use.
You don't _____ – we have one you can use.
- 3 This is a no-smoking area.
We aren't _____ in this area.
- 4 It is forbidden to take these documents out of the building.
You _____ these documents out of the building.
- 5 In theory we can't talk in the library, but everyone does.
We're _____ in the library, but everyone does.
- 6 You're obliged to wear a helmet on the construction site.
You _____ a helmet on the construction site.
- 7 Can I use your password to log in?
Am I _____ to log in?
- 8 Is it the law to drive on the right or the left in this country?
Do I _____ the left in this country?