

## 6.5 Modal verbs for obligation and permission

To express obligation or necessity, we use:

- **must**, especially when we refer to something the speaker feels is necessary:  
*I must talk to her right now. (I feel this is necessary.)*
- **have to**, especially when we refer to something that is necessary because of a rule or law:  
*My brother **has to** wear a suit to work. (These are the rules.)*
- **need to**:  
*Neil often **needs to** do overtime.*

To express lack of obligation or necessity, we use:

- **don't have to:**  
A tourist guide **doesn't have to** do physical work.
- **don't need to/needn't:**  
You **needn't** come to the office. You can work from home.  
You **don't need to** write the essay again.

To say what is allowed, we use **can**:

Journalists **can** work flexible hours.

To say what is not allowed, we use:

- **can't**, especially when the speaker feels something is not allowed:  
*I can't leave the office during office hours.*
- **mustn't**, if we want to express strong prohibition:  
*You mustn't check your private email at work.*

Obligation/necessity	Lack of obligation	Allowed	Not allowed/forbidden
have to / has to need to / needs to must	don't have to / doesn't have to don't need to / doesn't need to / needn't	can	can't mustn't

1 Choose the correct answer, a, b or c.

- 1 You    be physically fit to be a fire-fighter.  
a can      b have to      c need
- 2 A doctor    often work long hours and night shifts.  
a must      b can      c can't
- 3 A teacher    look smart or wear a suit to work.  
a mustn't      b doesn't need to      c can't
- 4 Self-employed people    take a holiday any time they choose.  
a need to      b have to      c can
- 5 A journalist    write things which are not true.  
a needn't      b doesn't have to      c mustn't
- 6 Office workers usually    take many breaks during the day.  
a can't      b don't have to      c needn't
- 7 You    take a taxi. I can drive you to work.  
a can't      b needn't      c mustn't
- 8 Airline pilots    have excellent eyesight.  
a must      b need      c can

## 2 Choose the correct option.

1 **A:** Is it a formal meeting?  
**B:** No, you *must* / *don't need to* / *can* wear a tie.

2 **A:** Can I smoke in here?  
**B:** I'm afraid not. You *need to* / *needn't* / *mustn't* smoke anywhere inside this building.

3 **A:** What's wrong? You look stressed.  
**B:** I am. I *can* / *needn't* / *have to* finish all this work before the end of the week. There's so much of it!

4 **A:** Mr Long, I'd like to take a day off tomorrow.  
**B:** Sorry, I'm afraid you *don't need to* / *must* / *can't*.

5 **A:** You look worried. What's wrong?  
**B:** I have a meeting with my boss today. I *needn't* / *need to* / *don't need to* get to work on time. Otherwise, I'll lose my job.

6 **A:** Why *can't* Sarah come with us?  
**B:** She *mustn't* / *has to* / *can* prepare a presentation for her boss.

7 **A:** *Do I have to* / *Must I pay in cash?*  
**B:** No, you *needn't* / *mustn't* pay in cash. Your credit card will be enough.

3 Complete the second sentence so that it has the same meaning as the first. Use no more than five words including the word in capitals.

1 The company expects you to wear a uniform at work.  
**HAVE**  
You \_\_\_\_\_ a uniform at work.

2 It's not necessary for you to work long hours. **NEED**  
You \_\_\_\_\_ long hours.

3 It's forbidden to bring dogs into the laboratory. **MUST**  
You \_\_\_\_\_ into the laboratory.

4 It isn't necessary for Mike to bring his laptop today. **HAVE**  
Mike \_\_\_\_\_ bring his laptop today.

5 It's not OK for you to be smoking cigarettes in the office. **CAN'T**  
You \_\_\_\_\_ in the office.

4 Rewrite the parts of sentences in *italics* with *mustn't* or *don't have to*.

### 1. You are not obliged to work on Sundays

### 3 It's forbidden to smoke in here.

### 3 You're not allowed to wait here.

4 It's unnecessary for you to wait here.

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