

## 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/<br>forbidden |
|--|---|---------|---------------------------|
| have to / has to<br>need to / needs to<br>must | don't have to /<br>doesn't have to<br>don't need to /<br>doesn't need to /<br>needn't | can     | can't<br>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.*  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 *It's forbidden to smoke in here.*  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3 *You're not allowed to wait here.*  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4 *It's unnecessary for you to wait here.*  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5 *It's forbidden to walk on the lawn.*  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 6 *It isn't necessary for them to work on Sun*