

# Must vs. Have to: Obligations and Necessity

INTERMEDIATE

**Focus: Speaker's opinion vs. Facts, Written rules and instructions, Subjective vs. Objective necessity, Mustn't (Don't do it), Don't have to (No need to), Semantic differences in modals, Will have to (Future), Might/May have to (Possibility), Had to (Past necessity), I've got to vs. I have to**

## 1. Must vs. Have to (Affirmative)

Both words express obligation ("It is necessary"), but there is a slight difference in meaning.

- **Must (Subjective / Internal):** The speaker feels it is necessary. It is personal.
  - *Example:* "I **must** call my mother today." (I feel this obligation).
  - *Also used for:* Written rules and signs (e.g., "Passengers **must** fasten seatbelts").
- **Have to (Objective / External):** The obligation comes from outside (facts, laws, rules, or someone else).
  - *Example:* "I **have to** wear a uniform at work." (It is a rule, not my choice).

## 2. The Big Difference: Negatives

This is the most important distinction. In the negative form, the meanings change completely.

- **Mustn't (Prohibition):** You **cannot** do it. It is forbidden or dangerous.
  - *Example:* "You **mustn't** smoke in the hospital." (Don't do it!).
- **Don't have to (Lack of Necessity):** You can do it if you want, but you don't need to. It is optional.
  - *Example:* "You **don't have to** wash the dishes; I'll do them later." (No need).

## 3. "Have got to" (Informal)

In spoken English, we often use **have got to** (or just **'ve got to**) instead of **have to**. It adds emphasis or urgency.

- *Example:* "I **'ve got to** go now. It's late!"

## 4. Obligations in Other Tenses

**Must** is a "modal verb" and does not change form. It has no past or future tense. To express obligation in the past or future, we use forms of **have to**.

Tense	Form	Example
Past	Had to	"I <b>had to</b> leave early yesterday."
Future	Will have to	"We <b>will have to</b> buy a new car soon."
Possibility	Might/May have to	"If it rains, we <b>might have to</b> cancel."

## Practice Exercises

**Instruction:** Complete the sentences using the correct form of the verbs based on the context.

- Use **must** / **mustn't** for strong personal feelings or written rules.
- Use **have to** / **don't have to** (and its variations) for external rules and lack of necessity.
- Pay attention to **past** (had to), **future** (will have to), and **informal** (have got to) cues.

### Context Clues:

- (+): Affirmative
- (-): Negative (Prohibition or Lack of Necessity)
- (?): Question

1. Look at that sign. It says visitors \_\_\_\_\_ (sign) in at the reception desk.
2. You \_\_\_\_\_ (not/drive) down this street. It is a pedestrian-only zone!
3. Last night, my car broke down, so I \_\_\_\_\_ (walk) all the way home.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ (you/wear) a suit to the wedding next week, or is it casual?
5. We have plenty of food in the fridge, so we \_\_\_\_\_ (not/go) to the supermarket today.
6. I have a terrible toothache. I \_\_\_\_\_ (make) an appointment with the dentist immediately. (Speaker's feeling)
7. If the project fails, we \_\_\_\_\_ (start) everything from the beginning. (Future possibility)
8. \_\_\_\_\_ (she/work) on Saturdays? I thought she had weekends off.
9. "Bye, guys! I \_\_\_\_\_ (go) now. My mom is waiting for me." (Informal / Urgent)
10. You \_\_\_\_\_ (not/tell) anyone my secret. Promise me!
11. When we were children, we \_\_\_\_\_ (not/worry) about paying bills.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ (they/pay) a fine when the police stopped them yesterday?
13. It is a public holiday tomorrow, so I \_\_\_\_\_ (not/get up) early.
14. The doctor told him that he \_\_\_\_\_ (lose) weight for his health. (External fact)
15. Why \_\_\_\_\_ (we/wait) here? Can't we just go inside?

## Answer Key

1. **must sign** (Written rule)
2. **mustn't drive** (Prohibition/Forbidden)
3. **had to walk** (Past obligation)
4. **Will you have to wear / Do you have to wear** (Future/General obligation in question)
5. **don't have to go** (Lack of necessity)
6. **must make** (Subjective/Internal obligation)
7. **will have to start / might have to start** (Future obligation)
8. **Does she have to work** (Question regarding external routine)
9. **'ve got to go / have got to go** (Informal necessity)
10. **mustn't tell** (Prohibition/Strong advice)
11. **didn't have to worry** (Past lack of necessity)
12. **Did they have to pay** (Past question)
13. **don't have to get up / won't have to get up** (Lack of necessity)
14. **has to lose** (External obligation/Doctor's orders)
15. **do we have to wait** (Question about obligation)