

MUST or HAVE TO

Present Forms

Both **must** and **have to** are followed by an infinitive verb. **Must** behaves like a typical modal verb, it doesn't change according to the person and doesn't require an auxiliary verb to form negatives or questions. **Have to** conjugates like a normal verb form, requiring the auxiliary verb **do** for negatives and questions:

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I must go
She must go
They must go

I have to go
He has to go
We have to go

-

I mustn't go
She mustn't go
They mustn't go

I don't have to go
He doesn't have to go
We don't have to go

?

Must you go?
Must she go?
Must they go?

Do I have to go?
Does he have to go?
Do we have to?

Past forms

You can use **had to** for an obligation in the past. **Must have + past participle** is used to express certainty about the past. Compare these two sentences:

- *John **had to catch** the train home early because his wife was unwell.*
- *John **must have caught** the train home. He didn't have his car.*

Future forms

We use **will have to** for a future obligation, but **have to** is more often used when it's a future obligation that has already been arranged. **Will have to** is also used to make instructions sound less like a direct order. Compare:

- *I **have to see** the doctor tomorrow, I've got a problem with my shoulder.*
- *I'm afraid you'll **have to wait** for about 30 minutes, the doctor is running late today.*

Must is used for the future to give instructions or orders:

- You can borrow the car this afternoon, but **you must bring** it back by 6pm tonight as **I've got to** pick John up from the station at 6.30.

In example above **have got to** is used for a pre-arranged future obligation

Uses

Must and **have to** are both used to express obligation. Often they can be used interchangeably, however there are some differences in how we use them and the negative forms **mustn't** and **don't have to** are significantly different in their meaning.

We can use **must** to show that we are certain something is true based on some clear evidence or reason.

- *There's no heating on. **You must be** freezing.*
- *I can't remember what I did with it. **I must be** getting old.*

We also use **must** to express a strong obligation which is the result of some personal situation. The obligation is also the desire or will of the person speaking, it is not an order coming from someone else.

- *I'm so tired. **I must go** to bed earlier.*
- *We haven't seen you for ages! **You must come** and visit us some time.*

We also use **have to** to express a strong obligation. When we use **have to** this usually means that some external circumstance (or person!) obliges us to do something.

- ***I have to arrive** at work at 9 sharp, because my boss is very strict.*
- ***You have to pass** your exams with good grades or the university will not accept you.*

As you can see, the differences between the present forms are sometimes rather subtle. However, there is a big difference between the **negative forms**:

We use **mustn't** to express strong obligations NOT to do something.

- ***We mustn't talk** about this with anyone else. It's strictly confidential.*
- ***You mustn't phone** me at work. We aren't allowed personal calls.*

We use **don't have to** (or **haven't got to** in British English) to state that there is NO obligation or necessity.

- ***We don't have to get** there until half past seven, there's no rush.*
- ***You don't have to come** if you don't want to, you can stay here.*
- *He's not stressed. **He hasn't got to** finish the assignment until next Tuesday.*