

Modal Verbs

- ➔ Modal verbs can only be used in the present tense
- ➔ Modal verbs are always followed by the infinitive without "to"
- ➔ Modal verbs can only be used in the form they already have

Obligation: must + infinitive / needn't + infinitive

- use *must* when you feel **it is necessary to do something**
- use *needn't* when you feel it **isn't necessary to do something**
- use *have to* to express Obligation in the past

*I haven't spoken to Kate for ages. I **must** call her.*
*This is a fantastic film. You **must** go and see it.*
*Tomorrow is Sunday, so I **needn't** get up early.*
*but: I **had to** get up early yesterday. My plane left at six.*

Prohibition: mustn't + infinitive

- use *mustn't* when **it is necessary not to do something** (i.e. if something is prohibited)
- be careful: English 'mustn't' ≠ German 'nicht müssen' → nicht dürfen
- use *be allowed to* to express Prohibition in the past

*You **mustn't** break the law.*
*You **mustn't** drive too fast in the city.*
but: You weren't allowed to touch the pictures in the museum.

Ability: can/can't + infinitive

- use *can* and *can't* to talk about **things you are/aren't able to do** generally or at the moment
- use *could/couldn't* to talk about Ability in the past

*He **can't** swim. (= he never learned to swim)*
*She **can** speak Japanese. (= she is able to speak Japanese)*
*I **can** see the moon. (= I am able to see the moon now)*
*but: When I was a child, I **couldn't** swim.*

Advice: should/shouldn't + infinitive

- use *should/shouldn't* when you want to talk about something you think **is or isn't a good idea**, or give someone advice

*You **should** try to relax more.*
*You **shouldn't** smoke. It's bad for your health!*

A) Fill in *must*, *mustn't* or *needn't*.

1. I haven't got lots of money; I mustn't waste it.
2. Don't worry Paul, you've got plenty of time, you needn't hurry.
3. Do you want me to wait for you? No it's OK, you needn't wait.
4. This book is very expensive, you must look after it very carefully.

5. You needn't phone me when you arrive at home but I hope you will.
6. Balthazar is asleep, you mustn't shout like that.
7. You can tell Emilie what I said but she mustn't tell her husband.
8. What kind of dog do you want to buy? Well, it must be very sweet with my baby.
9. I have enough meat in my fridge so I needn't go to the butcher's today.
10. My mother gave me a present for my son, I mustn't forget to give it to him.

B) Four friends are in a café. If the underlined (modal) verb forms are wrong, correct them. If they are right, put a tick (✓). Be careful with the tenses.

Tim: Is that your phone ringing, John?

John: Yes. It can must be Dave. He said he would ring about now. No, wait a moment, it can't ✓ be Dave. That's not his phone number. I wonder who it is.

Phil: You'll have to (1) _____ answer it if you want to know! Who's that by the window, Tim? Is it Alice?

Tim: It needn't (2) _____ be. She's in New York. She must (3) _____ go there on business last Monday.

Phil: Then it must (4) _____ be her sister or something.

John: That was someone called Louise on the phone. I don't know her...

Phil: But she should (5) _____ have your number!

John: ... and she says she's in the café with us. By the window.

Tim: Really? Well, she could be the girl who looks like Alice.

John: Should I (6) _____ speak to her?

Phil: You mustn't (7) _____, because she's coming over now.

Lois: Hi, John. I'm Alice's cousin. She gave me your number.

John: Have a seat. Can I (8) _____ get you a coffee?

C) Put the following sentences into the Past Simple.

1. I must wear a suit to go to work.

I _____ to work.

2. You needn't pay the bill – I've already done that.

You _____ the bill – I had already done that.

3. I can't ride a bike – I've never learnt it.

I _____ a bike when I was a child.

4. The students mustn't talk during a test.

The students _____ during a test.

5. Robert needn't buy this book.

Robert _____ this book.

- D) Look at the signs on the right. What does each of them mean? Complete the sentences with *must*, *mustn't*, *needn't*, *should* or *shouldn't*.

1. You _____ pay for food and drinks separately.
2. You _____ leave a tip in this restaurant.
3. You _____ fasten your seat belt now.
4. You _____ drink this wine between 14 and 16°C.
5. Hotel staff _____ go into this room.
6. If you're in transit, you _____ go to the British Airways desk.
7. You _____ eat this after March 4th.
8. You _____ have any experience to work here.



Modal Verbs – KEY

A)

1. mustn't
2. needn't
3. needn't
4. must
5. needn't
6. mustn't
7. mustn't
8. must
9. needn't
10. mustn't

B)

1. ✓
2. can't
3. had to (→ past of "must")
4. ✓
5. must
6. ✓
7. must (have to)
8. ✓

C)

1. I had to wear a suit to go to work.
2. You didn't have to pay the bill – I had already done that.
3. I couldn't ride a bike when I was a child.
4. The students weren't allowed to talk during a test.
5. Robert didn't have to buy this book.

D)

1. must
2. needn't
3. must
4. should
5. mustn't
6. must
7. shouldn't
8. needn't