



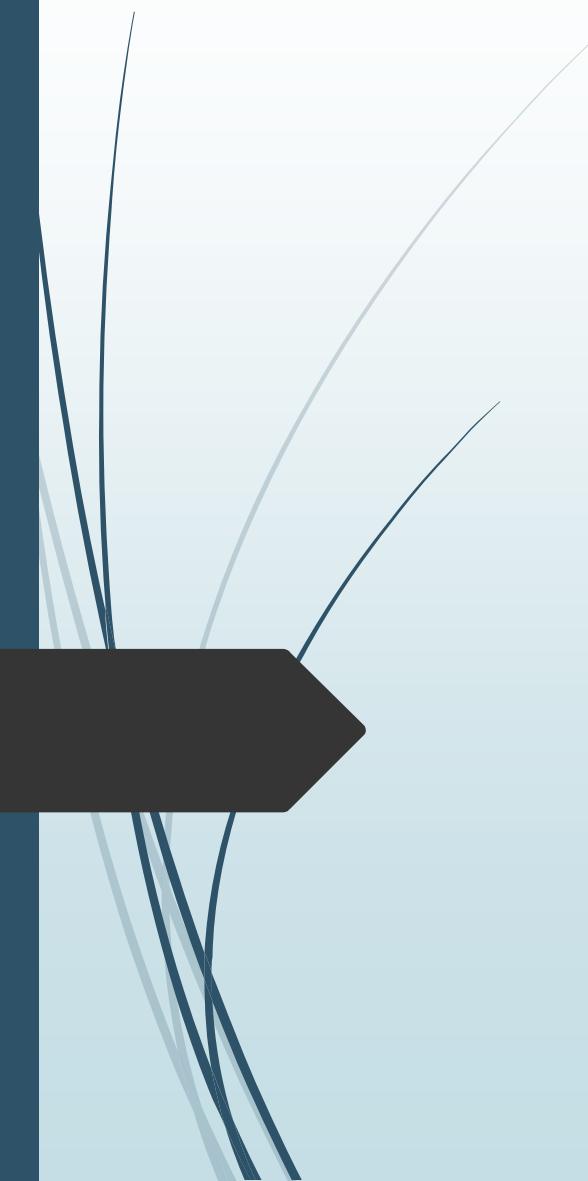
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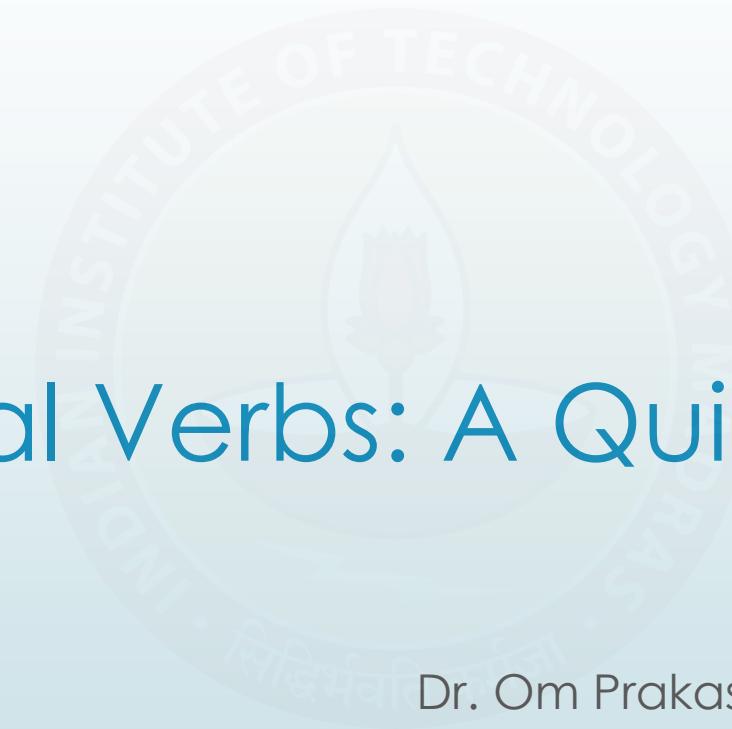
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Modal Verbs: A Quick Review



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Modal Verbs: A Quick Review

- A **modal verb** is a class of verbs that is used to indicate modality that is: likelihood, ability, permission, request, capacity, suggestions, order, obligation, or advice. Modal verbs always accompany the base (infinitive) form of another verb having semantic content. A modal verb gives information about the function of the main verb that it governs. Modals have a wide variety of communicative functions.
- Such as:
can, could, shall, should, may, might, will, would, must, ought to, etc.

English Modal Verbs

- ▶ Such Modal Verbs in English are **can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, ought to, must, need**. They have some characteristics in common:

- ▶ **they have no infinitive marker.**

- ▶ **to form the question, you invert the subject and the verb:**

Can you play the guitar?

- ▶ **to form a negative, you add not:**

You mustn't (=must not) forget your homework.

- ▶ **they are followed by the verb without to**

- ▶ **they contract to these forms:**

can't, couldn't, shan't, shouldn't, won't, wouldn't, mustn't, needn't. (The other contractions like mightn't or oughtn't to are rare.) We do not contract may not.

Shall/shan't

- **Shall/shan't are modal verbs and are only used with I and we. They can be used in a lot of different ways. The most important are:**
 - to make and ask for suggestions:
 - Shall we go and see a film? (=Let's go and see a film.)
 - What shall we say to him?
 - to offer to do something:
 - Shall I do the washing up?
 - to ask somebody what they want you to do:
 - Where shall I put your bag?
- **Note:** In spoken English, I will, I shall, we will, we shall, he will, they will etc. are usually contracted to I'll, we'll, he'll, they'll, etc.

Might

- ▶ **Might + verb**
- ▶ This is used to talk about a future action which we are not sure about:
 - It might rain. (= It is possible that it will rain.)
 - I might go.

Can

Can is used:

- ▶ **to talk about ability:**

He can swim.

He can't play tennis.

- ▶ **to request something:**

Can I speak to Mark, please?

Can you repeat that?

Can I smoke?

- ▶ **in the negative we use can't to say something is logically impossible:**

It can't be true.

He can't be married-he lives on his own.

Could

Could is used

- ▶ **to talk about ability in the past:**

I could swim when I was six.

- ▶ **to make suggestions:**

We could go to the beach.

- ▶ **to ask somebody to do something:**

Could you tell me the time?

- ▶ **to ask for permission:**

Could I leave the room?

- ▶ **to talk about a possibility in the present:**

He could be French.

May

May is used

- ▶ **to ask for permission formally:**

May I talk to you a second?

- ▶ **to talk about things in the future which are not certain:**

The weather may be lovely tomorrow.

- ▶ **Might is used to talk about actions in the future which are not certain:**

There might be an earthquake at any time.

Shall

Shall is used

- ▶ **to make and ask for suggestions:**

Shall we go and see a film? (= Let's go and see a film.)

What shall we say to him?

- ▶ **to offer to do something:**

Shall I do the washing up?

- ▶ **to ask somebody what they want you to do:**

Where shall I put your bag?

Should

Should is used:

► **to ask for and give advice:**

A: What should you do if you get sunburn?

B: You should put cream on your skin.

► **to make suggestions:**

I think we should go home.

Will

Will is used:

► **for talking about the future.**

► **to make offers:**

I'll do it for you.

► **to make promises.**

I'll do it as soon as I can.

► **Would is used to make conditional sentences in the phrase:**

Would you like ...?

Ought to

- ▶ Ought to this is used in the same way as should (see above). In the negative, you usually say shouldn't, not oughtn't to.
- ▶ Need: This is usually a 'normal' verb, which forms its negatives and questions in the usual way:

Do you need anything?

I don't need to do anything.

But the negative form needn't is very common:

We needn't go immediately.

Must

Must is used:

- **to express an obligation or give an order:**

You must go to bed early.

You must stop doing that.

We must be more careful in future.

- **to give advice:**

If you go to Britain, you must try fish and chips.

Mustn't is used

- **to express a prohibition:**

You mustn't go swimming after lunch.

Have to

- ▶ **Have to is used in place of must to express an obligation:**

New students have to/must register on their first day.

- ▶ **It is also used in the past or future because must is not possible:**

We all had to give in our names.

You will have to be brave.

- ▶ **Have (got) to:**

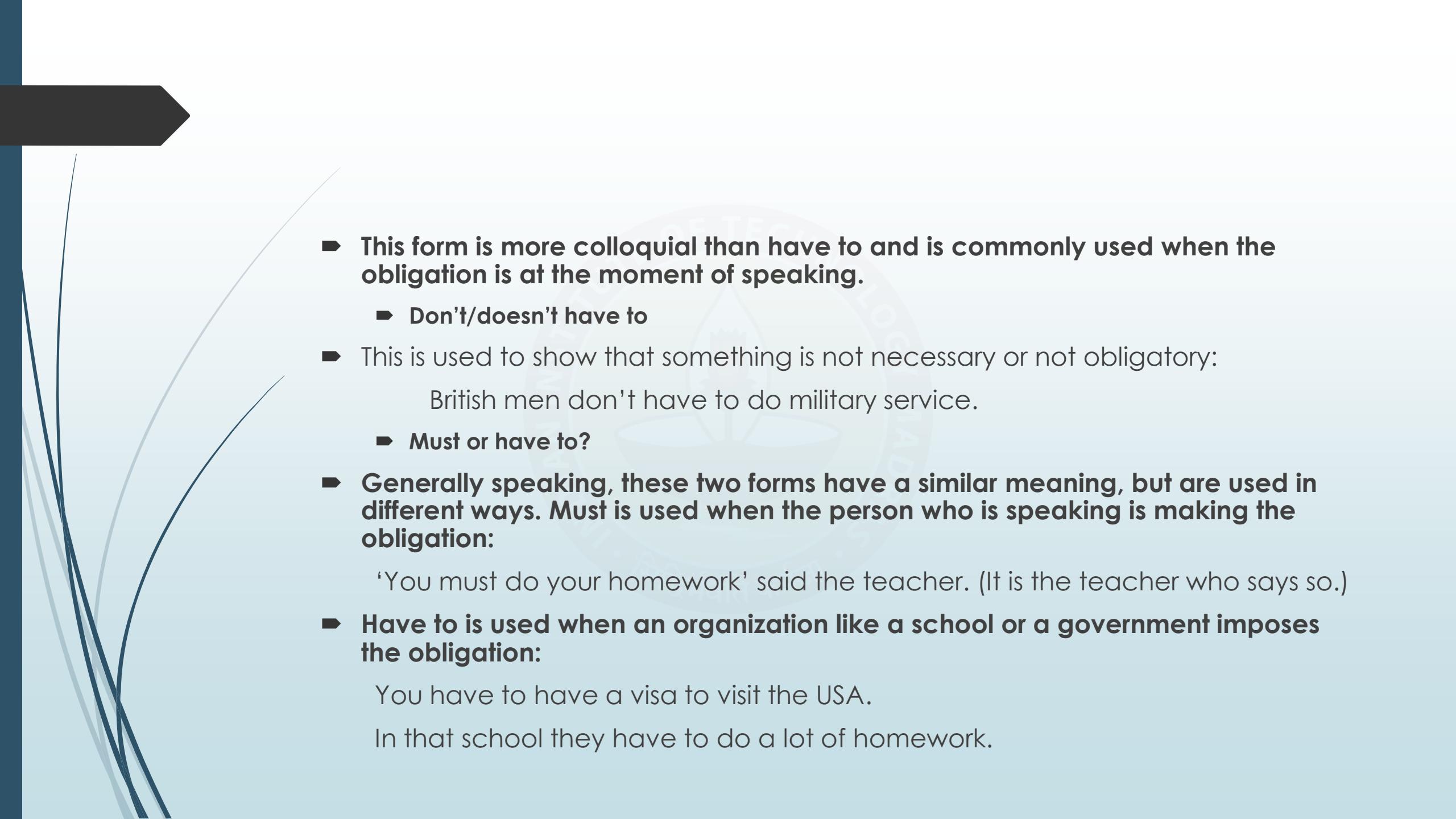
- ▶ **This is used in the same way as have to. The negative is haven't got to and the question form is**

Have you got to...?

I've got to go to the bank.

We haven't got to be there until 12 o'clock.

Have you got to change money?

- 
- ▶ This form is more colloquial than have to and is commonly used when the obligation is at the moment of speaking.
 - ▶ Don't/doesn't have to
 - ▶ This is used to show that something is not necessary or not obligatory:

British men don't have to do military service.

 - ▶ Must or have to?
 - ▶ Generally speaking, these two forms have a similar meaning, but are used in different ways. Must is used when the person who is speaking is making the obligation:

'You must do your homework' said the teacher. (It is the teacher who says so.)
 - ▶ Have to is used when an organization like a school or a government imposes the obligation:

You have to have a visa to visit the USA.

In that school they have to do a lot of homework.

Mustn't or don't/doesn't have to?

- ▶ These two forms mean different things. Mustn't shows an obligation, but an obligation not to do something. It is like can't:

You mustn't smoke in here= (You can't smoke in here.)

- ▶ Don't have to is used when there is no obligation at all – you can do what you like. It is like needn't or don't need to:

You don't have to come. (=You don't need to come.)

Useful phrases which are like modal verbs

Be able to:

- ▶ This is used in the same way as can but only in the sense of ability:
- ▶ He is able to walk now.

Be allowed to :

- ▶ This is used in place of can or could to talk about permission:
Are we allowed to smoke?
We weren't allowed to go out after nine at night.



Used to + verb:

- ▶ This is used to talk about states, situations or repeated actions (habits and routines) that you did in the **past** but don't do now:
- ▶ Repeated actions:

She used to play tennis every week, but now she plays football.
- ▶ States:

I used to be very fat, but I've lost a lot of weight.
- ▶ Situations:

I used to live in Brazil.
- ▶ You cannot use this form in present.
- ▶ NB: Don't confuse this verb with the adjective used to + noun/... ing which means 'accustomed to' or 'familiar with'.