

7A permission, obligation, and necessity

can, must, should, ought to, had better

- 1 I **couldn't** take any photos in the gallery, so I bought some postcards.
If you want to apply for this job, you **must** be able to speak Spanish.
We **should / ought to** go on the motorway – it's much quicker.
 - 2 We **should have / ought to have gone** on the motorway – it would have been quicker.
 - 3 You'd **better** post the parcels today or they won't get there in time.
- 1 The most common modal verbs for talking about permission and obligation are *can / could, must, and should / ought to*.
• We can also use *May I...?* to ask for permission, e.g. *May I use your phone?*
 - 2 We can use *should have* or *ought to have* + past participle to talk about past events which did not happen and which we regret.
 - 3 *had better* is stronger and more urgent than *should / ought to* and is often used to give strong advice or a warning. It normally refers to the immediate future.
• The negative is *had better not*. NOT *hadn't better*.

mustn't / don't have to

You **mustn't** bring children under 12 into this restaurant.
You **don't have to** tip here unless you think the service was especially good.

mustn't and *don't have to* are completely different.

- *mustn't* is used to express an obligation **not** to do something.
- *don't / doesn't have to* is used to express an absence of obligation.

need

- 1 You usually **need to** check in at least two hours before a flight leaves.
You **don't need to** take a jacket. It's going to be hot today.
 - 2 We **needn't** lock the car. Nobody will steal it in this village.
 - 3 We **needn't have booked / didn't need to book**. The restaurant is empty!
 - 4 We had plenty of petrol so we **didn't need to stop**, which saved time.
- 1 We use *need / don't need + to* + infinitive to say that something is necessary / unnecessary. You can use these forms for habitual, general, and specific necessity.
 - 2 When we want to say that something is unnecessary on a specific occasion, we can also use *needn't + infinitive without to*.



don't need to or needn't?

We use *don't need to* (NOT *needn't*) for habitual or general necessity, e.g. *I don't need to wear glasses. My eyesight is still good.* NOT *I needn't wear glasses.*

- 3 When something was not necessary, but you did it, you can use either *needn't have* + past participle or *didn't need to* + infinitive.
- 4 When something was not necessary, so you did **not** do it, you must use *didn't need to*. NOT *We had plenty of petrol so we needn't have stopped, which saved time.*
• Compare:
We didn't need to book. (= It wasn't necessary. We may have booked or we may not.)
We needn't have booked. (= We booked, but it wasn't necessary.)

be able to, be allowed to, be permitted to, be supposed / meant to

- 1 From tomorrow we **won't be able to** park in this street.
You're **not allowed to** smoke in any public buildings in our country.
 - 2 It is **not permitted to** take mobiles into the exam room.
 - 3 We **are supposed / meant to** check in at 3.30. What's the time now?
You **aren't supposed / meant to** park here – it's a hospital entrance.
- 1 We often use *person + be able to* or *be allowed to* + infinitive instead of *can* to talk about what is possible or permitted.
• We **don't** use *it isn't allowed to...* NOT *It isn't allowed to take mobiles into the exam room.*
 - 2 *it + be permitted to* + infinitive is used in formal situations, e.g. notices and announcements, to say what *can / can't* be done according to the law or to rules and regulations.
 - 3 We can also use *be supposed to / be meant to* + infinitive to say what people should or shouldn't do, often because of rules. There is often a suggestion that the rules are not necessarily obeyed, e.g. *Students are not supposed / meant to have guests after 12.00, but everyone does.*

a **Circle** the right form. Tick (✓) if both are possible.

We **couldn't / weren't allowed to** go out at night when we were at boarding school. ✓

- 1 You **aren't supposed to / aren't meant to** park here, but everyone does.
- 2 You'd **better not / don't have to** use his computer. He hates other people touching it.
- 3 I **shouldn't have / mustn't have** lost my temper last night. I feel really guilty about it now.
- 4 It is **not permitted / not allowed to** take flash photographs in this museum.
- 5 You **can / need to** pay cash here as they don't accept credit cards.
- 6 You are **allowed to / able to** drive in the UK when you are 17.
- 7 We **didn't need to get / needn't have got** a visa, which was lucky, as we only booked our holiday at the last minute.
- 8 You really **ought to have / should have** got specialist advice about your back problem.
- 9 You **better / 'd better** be on time tomorrow or you may be thrown out of class!
- 10 You **don't have to / needn't** bring your car – we can go in mine.

b Complete the sentences with **three** words.

If you don't finish your homework, you won't be **able to watch** TV.

- 1 You don't _____ to go into the art gallery. Entrance is free.
- 2 We remind you that this is a non-smoking flight. Smoking _____ anywhere on the aircraft.
- 3 You'd _____ late – you know what Jane is like about punctuality!
- 4 You _____ back until next month. I'm in no hurry for the money.
- 5 You _____ you didn't like the pasta. You know how sensitive he is about his cooking.
- 6 It was a difficult journey because we _____ trains three times.
- 7 A lot of people think that governments _____ more to protect young people's health.
- 8 You aren't _____ e-cigarettes in pubs in the UK.
- 9 We didn't _____ sweaters after all – it's really warm!
- 10 Am I _____ a suit to the wedding, or is it quite informal?

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