

# Have to

## Introduction



'We **have to** finish this by the end of August.'

## Definition

The verb **to have to** has the same function as a modal auxiliary verb and has different uses.

## Construction

**affirmative:** subject + 'have to' + **bare infinitive**  
You **have to** go. He **has to** go

**negative:** subject + 'do not' + 'have to' + **bare infinitive**  
You **don't have to** go. He **doesn't have to** go.

**interrogative:** 'do' + subject + 'have to' + **bare infinitive**  
**Do** you **have to** go? **Does** he **have to** go?

**Note that** unlike modal auxiliary verbs, **to have to** takes the usual forms of 'have' depending on the subject and the tense. We avoid contracting **have to**.

## Have got to

**Have got to** is a common alternative to **have to** in informal conversation in the present tense. It is usually contracted.

**affirmative:** subject + 'have got to' + **bare infinitive**

You've got to go. He's got to go

**negative:** subject + 'have not got to' + **bare infinitive**

You haven't got to go. He hasn't got to go.

**interrogative:** 'have' + subject + 'got to' + **bare infinitive**

Have you got to go? Has he got to go?

**Note that** although **have got to** can be used for any of the uses of **have to**, it is less likely to be used for obligation. It is also more common in specific than general situations. For example:

We **have to** do one hour of elearning before our telephone meetings.

I **have to/ve got to** do my elearning this morning - I've got a meeting later.

## Uses

Use	Examples
Necessity	<p>We've got to finish this by Friday.</p> <p>We don't have to get here so early tomorrow - the meeting was postponed.</p> <p>You haven't got to go to the doctor's for aspirin. You can buy them directly from the chemist.</p> <p>You have to work hard if you want to succeed.</p> <p>The company has to improve its sales figures next year.</p>

<p><b>Obligation - when there is a rule or requirement.</b></p>	<p>We <b>have to</b> wear a suit and tie to work when we have visitors.</p> <p>You <b>don't</b> all <b>have to</b> be there - just one person from each team will be enough.</p> <p>You <b>haven't got to</b> wear a suit and tie to work on Friday. You can wear jeans instead.</p> <p>Visitors <b>have to</b> report to reception.</p> <p>All drivers and passengers <b>have to</b> wear seatbelts.</p>
<p><b>Strong advice, including to oneself.</b></p> <p>We cannot use <b>don't have to</b> here.</p>	<p>You <b>have to</b> go the doctor's - you're not getting better.</p> <p>I <b>have to</b> remember to phone him back.</p>
<p><b>Deduction - when we believe something is certain.</b></p> <p>We cannot use <b>don't have to</b> here.</p>	<p>That's <b>got to</b> be Carole at the door - I'm expecting her.</p> <p>You <b>have to</b> be better at English now - you work for an English company.</p> <p>"How old is she?" "Well, she started work a few years before me so she <b>has to</b> be about 40."</p>
<p><b>To talk about the best or right thing to do. [a strong opinion]</b></p> <p>We cannot use <b>don't have to</b> here.</p>	<p>Banks <b>have to</b> tell customers in advance about charges.</p> <p>The government <b>has to</b> reduce spending.</p> <p>We <b>have got to</b> protect the environment.</p>

## 'Don't have to' or 'mustn't'?

These do not have the same meaning.

'**Mustn't**' suggests that something is prohibited or it is not the right or recommended thing to do.

'**Don't have to**' means that something is not necessary or obligatory. So it can be the opposite of both '**have to**' and '**must**'.

For example:

Mustn't	Don't have to
Employees <b>mustn't</b> wear jeans to work. [forbidden]	You <b>don't have to</b> wear jeans to work. [it is not necessary - you have a choice]
You <b>mustn't</b> eat that - it will make you fat. [advice] You <b>mustn't</b> eat that - it's not acceptable in this country. [forbidden]	You <b>don't have to</b> eat that - you can give it to the cat if you don't like it! [not necessary]
You <b>mustn't</b> change trains - you'll get lost. [advice]	You <b>don't have to</b> change trains because it's a direct service. [not necessary]
You <b>mustn't</b> make eye contact with Japanese people. ✓	You <b>don't have to</b> make eye contact with Japanese people. ✗
It might rain later but you <b>mustn't</b> take an umbrella. ✗	It might rain later but you <b>don't have to</b> take an umbrella if you don't want to. ✓

## The past simple

It rained on Saturday so we **had to** cancel the barbecue.  
When I worked in a factory, everyone **had to** wear protective clothing.  
They **didn't have to** pay a deposit.  
**Did** you **have to** phone him to confirm?

## Future tenses

**Have to** can be used in several future forms. For example:

All delegates **have to** arrive at the conference one hour before it begins.

Tom can't come to the meeting so we'll **have to** arrange another date.  
We're **going to have to** postpone the launch until next month.

## Examples



Do you **have to** have vaccinations if you go to North Africa?



That's **got to** hurt!



Tonight has been great - you **have to** come and see us again soon.



I've just **got to** fix this. Then I'll get ready to go out.



You'll **have to** do better than this if you want to pass the exam.

## Further information

'**Have to**' can be used with other modal auxiliary verbs. For example:

I might **have to** pick him up from the airport later.

I shouldn't **have to** write this report; it's usually Jan's responsibility.

## The present continuous

'Have to' is not normally followed by the **present continuous**. It is more usual to use 'must'.

For necessity we can use 'have to' in the present continuous. For example:

We're **having to** repaint the kitchen.  
He's **having to** work late all this week.

'Have to' is also possible in the **present perfect** and **past perfect**:

I'm going to Japan for the first time next week so I've **had to** learn some Japanese expressions.

I've **been having to** do all of Janette's work while she's been on holiday.

Two years ago I went to work in England for six months. Before that, I **hadn't had to** speak English since I was at school.

He'd **been having to** deal with this on his own until we employed an assistant.



## 'Have to' or 'must'?

These have the same general meaning but are sometimes used in different ways.

For necessity, 'must' is often used in formal situations - spoken or written. For example, in a formal announcement or a written notice. In everyday conversation, we use 'have to'.

If you hear 'must' in conversation, it is being used emphatically or as advice, including to oneself.

For example:

'Have to' for necessity [conversation]	'Must' for necessity [formal or emphatic]
"We <b>have to</b> wear protective clothing at work."	All visitors to this site <b>must</b> wear protective clothing.
"Oh, look. We <b>have to</b> show our ID cards before we go in."	ID cards <b>must</b> be shown before entering.
"Sorry, but I <b>have to</b> leave the meeting early today. Is that OK?" 	"Sorry, but I <b>must</b> leave the meeting early today. Is that OK?" 

"Arnaud won't be at the meeting next week. He <b>has to</b> go to Paris to see a client."	"Arnaud won't be at the meeting next week. He <b>must</b> go to Paris to see a client." ❌
	"You really <b>must</b> eat less if you want to get into that dress for the wedding."
	"You <b>must</b> finish that before Friday or we'll lose the contract."
'Must' for advice - telling yourself what you should do.	
"I <b>have to</b> go to the bank today." [I have an appointment or I need to get some money etc.]	"I <b>must</b> go to the bank today." [I should have gone last week but I've been busy and I keep postponing it. I'm going on holiday tomorrow so if I don't get my foreign currency today, it will be too late!]
"The doctor told me I <b>have to</b> stop drinking wine while I'm taking these tablets."	"I <b>must</b> stop drinking wine every evening - I'm not sleeping very well at the moment!"
"I <b>have to</b> find a new job by January when this contract finishes."	"I <b>must</b> start looking for a new job - I just don't enjoy working here anymore."
	"I <b>mustn't</b> forget to call Louise today."

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