

# To need and need

## Introduction



I **need** to speak to your manager urgently - can you put me through?

## Definition

**Need** is a modal auxiliary verb.

**To need** has a similar function and meaning and is more commonly used.

## Construction

	To need	Need
Affirmative	subject + 'need' + <b>infinitive</b> I <b>need</b> to go. He <b>needs</b> to go.	No affirmative form. See note below. I <b>need</b> go. ❌
Negative	subject + 'do' + 'not' + 'need' + <b>infinitive</b> I <b>don't need</b> to go. He <b>doesn't need</b> to go.	subject + 'need' + 'not' + <b>bare infinitive</b> I <b>needn't</b> go.
Interrogative	'do' + subject + 'need' + <b>infinitive</b> <b>Do I need</b> to go? <b>Does he need</b> to go?	'need' + subject + <b>bare infinitive</b> <b>Need I</b> go?

## Note that

1. Like other modal auxiliaries, **need** has no infinitive and we use the same form with 'I', 'you', 'he', 'she', 'it', 'we' and 'they'. 'Do' is not used to form negative or interrogative sentences.
2. **To need** takes the usual forms depending on the subject and the tense.
3. **To need** can also be followed by a noun or gerund.

You **need** a visa to visit Japan.  
My apartment **needs** cleaning.

This is not possible with the modal auxiliary **need**.

You **don't need** a visa to visit Japan.   
You **needn't** a visa to visit Japan. 

## Uses

**To need** and **need** are both used to talk about something that is necessary.

## Affirmative forms

**Need** cannot be used in the affirmative form instead of **to need** but we might read or hear it very rarely in this kind of sentence:

He **need** have no fear of losing her - she loves him very much.

Similarly, we can use it with negative or restrictive words such as 'hardly', 'never', 'nobody' or 'only'.

We **need** only provide lunch for the visitors - they'll have dinner at the hotel.  
I **need** hardly say how important it is that we respect the deadline.  
If we solve this before the end of the day, he **need** never know about it.

## Negative forms

**Need** can be used in the negative form instead of **to need**.

You **don't need** to come to the meeting if you don't want to.

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You **needn't** come to the meeting if you don't want to.

Most of the time, either form can be used but **don't need** is usually preferred for a general rather than a specific necessity:

You **needn't/don't need** to email him today - it can wait until tomorrow.

You **don't need** to be fluent in English to write an email.

**Needn't/don't need** are mainly used in the same way as 'don't have to'. 'Don't have to' is sometimes preferred when the lack of necessity is a general truth or decided by someone other than the speaker:

You **needn't/don't need** to/don't **have to** bring any wine tonight - we have plenty.

You don't **have to** take wine to Lionel's parties - he always has plenty.

## Interrogative forms

**To need** is preferred in modern, spoken English:

**Do** you **need** to leave now?

**Need** is considered very formal:

**Need** you leave now?

## Other tenses

The present continuous

Future tenses

**To need** and **needn't** can also be followed by the **present continuous**:

We **need** to be working on the first phase of the project this week.

We **needn't** be working on the second phase this week.

We can use the present simple form of **to need** or other future tenses. For example:

We **need** to talk about this tomorrow. [the need is felt now]

If you visit England, you'll **need** to take an umbrella.

We're **going to need** to employ more staff.

These are very similar and often interchangeable but **to need** sometimes suggests there is a choice or a potential personal benefit:

I **need** to send three more emails before I go home tonight.

I **need** to buy some bread on the way home - is there a baker's near here?

whereas **have to** can suggest a lack of choice or something decided or imposed by another person. There is also a suggestion of urgency a negative consequence if something is not done:

I **have to** finish this today because I'm going on holiday tomorrow.

The boss told me I **have to** go to Paris next week - he wants me to speak to the client personally.

In the past simple, 'had to' is used more than **needed to**.

It rained so we **had to** cancel the barbecue. ✓

It rained so we **needed to** cancel the barbecue. ✗

## Need as a noun

'Need' is also a noun with a related meaning. It can be used in different ways. For example:

**There's no need for another office in Paris - we already have two.**

**There's no need to finish that today - I'll do it tomorrow.**

**We have need of some new computers.**

**I'm in need of chocolate.**

**The company respects the needs of its overseas staff.**

## Examples



**I **need** to finish this by Friday.**



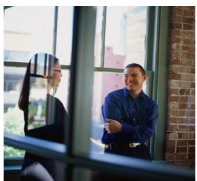
**Nobody **need** find out if we keep this to ourselves.**



**She **doesn't need** to work today.**



**You **needn't** worry - I can fix it.**



**Shall we go for a coffee or **do** you **need** to get back to the office?**



**Need** we make a decision now or can we wait till next week?



It **needn't** be expensive to visit London - buses are cheap and most museums are free.



My office **needs** tidying before my visitors arrive.



You **need** to be getting much better results than this.



We'll **need** to look at these figures more closely later to develop a strategy.

## Some common expressions

Expression	Meaning	Example
If <b>need</b> be.	If it is necessary.	Don't worry, we can spend an extra day on this if <b>need</b> be.

subject + **needn't** +  
'bother' (+ **gerund**)

**Don't need to** - it often  
expresses annoyance.

"I'll do that later."  
"You **needn't** bother. I'll  
do it myself."

**Note that this is**  
considered very familiar  
and should be avoided in  
the 2<sup>nd</sup> person.

He **needn't** bother  
apologising - I've had  
enough of him.



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