
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Grammar

'Have to' and 'must'



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Finn

Hello. Welcome to 6 Minute Grammar with me, Finn.

Alice

And me, Alice. Hello.

Finn

In today's programme we're talking about **have to** and **must**...

Alice

Have to and **must**. We'll look at what they mean...

Finn

We'll find out how to use them in sentences...

Alice

We'll have a pronunciation tip...

Finn

And we'll do some practice with a quiz.

Alice

So let's get started. We use both **must** and **have to** in front of verbs, to talk about obligations – things that are necessary. In natural English, they often have very similar meanings. And here's Catherine to demonstrate.

Catherine

I **have to** leave work early today.

I **must** leave work early today.

Finn

Thanks Catherine. **I have to leave** and **I must leave**. Those sentences have pretty similar meanings – but that's not always the case.

Alice

So let's look more closely at **have to**. Catherine.

Catherine

My doctor says I have to lose weight.

If you go to Russia, you have to get a visa.

Alice

So we use **have to** for things that are necessary – including laws. You can't go to some countries without a visa – you **have to** get one.

Finn

Yes, with **have to**, the obligation usually comes from someone else: a doctor, a government... or maybe your boss.

Alice

And this is where **must** is sometimes different. **Must** often suggests that the speaker decided themselves that it's necessary to do something. Here are some examples:

Catherine

I'm putting on weight. I must join a gym.

I haven't spoken to my sister this week. I must give her a call.

Finn

So that's **must** for personal necessities.

Alice

We can also use **must** to make recommendations, like this:

Catherine

When you go to Germany, **you must try Bratwurst**. It's delicious!

Alice

We sometimes see **must** in formal notices or rules of an organisation. A hospital sign might say:

Catherine

Visitors must wash their hands before leaving the ward.

Alice

Now, let's look at negatives. First: **don't have to**.

Finn

Ok: if you **don't have to** do something, it isn't necessary to do it, but you can if you want. Catherine.

Catherine

In the UK, you don't have to drink alcohol in pubs.

Alice

Don't have to means: it's your choice. But **mustn't** means: don't do it: It is necessary not to do it.

Catherine

You mustn't eat meat that's old.

Finn

In other words: don't eat meat that's old – it could make you ill.

Alice

So – we can use **mustn't** for both rules, and personal recommendations. Catherine.

Catherine

You mustn't forget to call your sister!

Passengers must not speak to the driver while the bus is moving.

Alice

Passengers **must not**... that sounds serious.

Finn

It does. The long form **must not** is more formal than the short form **mustn't**.

IDENT

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Finn

And we're talking about **must** and **have to**. Now, a quick word about tenses.

Alice

Yes: it's important to note that we don't use **must** in the future or the past. Instead, it's **will have to** for the future and **had to** for the past. Catherine.

Catherine

You must talk to your doctor. You'll have to see her tomorrow.

You didn't have to answer all the questions in yesterday's exam, but you must answer all the questions in today's exam.

Finn

Now: time for that pronunciation tip we promised you.

Alice

Yes: In natural speech, **have to** and **must** can get a bit squashed.

Catherine

I have to go to the doctor.

I must join a gym.

Alice

So **have to** sounds like 'hafta': **I have to** [hafta] go to the doctor. 'Hafta'.

Finn

And **must** sounds like 'mus': without the final 't' sound: **I must** join [musjoin] a gym. 'Mus'.

Alice

So listen out for those sounds in our quiz.

Finn

Ooh yes, we **must** have a quiz before we go. I'll say a sentence with **must**. You decide if I'm talking about a rule or if it's just a personal recommendation. Ready? Number 1. I need some exercise. **I must** go to the gym.

Alice

And that's a personal recommendation.

Finn

That's right... number 2. Again, is this a rule or is it a personal recommendation? You **mustn't** smoke in the building.

Alice

No smoking in the buildings – that's a rule.

Finn

That's right. Number 3. I'm going to say a sentence in the present tense, and you have to put it into the past. Here goes: I **must** have a cup of tea!

Alice

And in the past it's I **had to** have a cup of tea.

Finn

Well done if you got all those right!

Finn

... There's lots more about **must** and **have to** on our website at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Grammar.

All

Bye.