

## 14 ought, should, must, have to, need for obligation

### 139 ought: forms

ought is a modal verb (see 107 B),

The same form can be used for present and future and for the past ;' when preceded by a verb in a past tense or followed by a perfect ' infinitive:

" / ought to write to him today/tomorrow. "• I knew I ought to write to him. She said I ought to write. I know/knew that I ought to have written. "' .Negative; ought not/oughtn't

Interrogative: ought I? etc.

Negative interrogative: ought I not/oughtn't I? etc.

ought takes the full infinitive, and to remind students of this, it is ' sometimes referred to as ought to.

^ "Questions or remarks with ought may be answered by should and " 'vice versa:

" You ought to put in central heating. ~ Yes, I suppose I should.

### 140 should: forms

should is also a modal verb.

Like ought, the same form can be used for present and future and for the past when preceded by a verb in a past tense, should could replace ought to in the above examples. :'. Negative: should not/shouldn't

Interrogative: should I? etc. . Negative interrogative: should I not/shouldn't I? etc.

should is followed by the bare infinitive.

should and ought, used for obligation, normally have the same meaning but should is the more usual form.

In conversation should/ought to can often be used alone, the infinitive being understood but not mentioned:

You should paint/ought to paint your door. ~ Yes, I know ! should/ I know I ought to.

## 13 can and be able for ability

### 136 can and be able: forms

can is used here in conjunction with be + the adjective able, which supplies the missing parts of can and provides an alternative form for the present and past tense. We have therefore the following forms:

Infinitive: to be able

Past participle: been able

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	<u>Affirmative</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Interrogative</u>
Future be able	will/shall he able	will/shall not will he be able? etc.	shall/will I be able?
Present am able	can or am not able	cannot or am I able? etc.	can I? or
Past was able	could or was not able	could not or was I able? etc.	could I? or

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There is only one future form, for can is not used in the future except to express permission.

In the conditional, however, we have two forms:

*could* and *would be able*.

All other tenses are formed with be able according to the rules for ordinary verbs:

Present perfect: *have been able*

Past perfect: *had been able*

Negative interrogative: *could you not/couldn't you? were you not/weren't you able? will you not/won't you be able?* etc.

can/be/will/shall not and have can be contracted in the usual way:

*I wasn't able, he won't be able, I've been able.*

can is followed by the bare infinitive.

**be able** is followed by the full infinitive.

137 **can/am able, could/was able**

A **can and be able**

1 **shall/will be able** is the only future form:

*Our baby will be able to walk in a few weeks.*

2 Either **can** or **am able** may be used in the present, **can** is the more usual:

*Can you/Are you able to type?*

*I can't pay you today. Can you wait till tomorrow? or*

*Could you wait? (request: see B2 below)*

3 For the present perfect, however, we must use the **be able** form:

*Since his accident he hasn't been able to leave the house.*

B **could**

1 **could** can be used with a present meaning when there is an idea of condition:

*Could you run the business by yourself? (if this was necessary)*

*Could he get another job? (if he left this one)*

*I could get you a copy. (if you want one)*

In the first two examples **could** is replaceable by **would be able**.

2 **could you?** is a very good way of introducing a request. It is an alternative to **would you?** and a little more polite:

*Could you show me the way/lend me £5/wait half an hour?*

*Could you please send me an application form?*

**couldn't you?** is also useful:

*HOUSEHOLDER: Could you come and mend a leak in a pipe?*

*PLUMBER: Would sometime next month suit you?*

*HOUSEHOLDER: Couldn't you come a little earlier?*

**Could** and **was able** used for past ability

For ability only, either can be used:

*When I was young I could/was able to climb any tree in the forest.*

For ability + particular action, use **was able**:

*Although the pilot was badly hurt he was able to explain what had happened. (He could and did explain.)*

*The boat capsized quite near the bank so the children were able to swim to safety.*

*(They could and did swim.)*

This rule, however, is relaxed in the negative when the action did not take place, and with verbs of the senses:

*He read the message but he couldn't/wasn't able to understand it.*

*I could/was able to see him through the window.*

**had been able** is the past perfect form:

*He said he had lost his passport and hadn't been able to leave the country.*

(For **could** in reported speech, see 312.)

138 **could + perfect infinitive**

A This form is used for past ability when the action was not performed:

*I could have lent you the money. Why didn't you ask me? (see also 154)*

or when we don't know whether it was performed or not:

*The money has disappeared! Who could have taken it?*

*Tom could have (taken it); he was here alone yesterday.*

Compare:

*He was able to send a message. (He sent it.)*

*He could have sent a message. (He didn't send it or we don't know whether he sent it or not. See also 135.)*

B **could + perfect infinitive** can also express irritation at or reproach for the non-performance of an action:

*You could have told me = I am annoyed/disappointed that you didn't tell me. You should have told me.*

There would be a strong stress on the word the speaker wishes to emphasize. (For might used in the same way, see 285.)

## 14 ought, should, must, have to, need for obligation

### 139 ought: forms

**ought** is a modal verb (see 107 B).

The same form can be used for present and future and for the past when preceded by a verb in a past tense or followed by a perfect infinitive:

*I ought to write to him today/tomorrow.*

*I knew I ought to write to him.*

*She said I ought to write.*

*I know/knew that I ought to have written.*

Negative; *ought not/oughtn't*

Interrogative: *ought I?* etc.

Negative interrogative: *ought I not/oughtn't I?* etc.

**ought** takes the full infinitive, and to remind students of this, it is sometimes referred to as **ought to**.

Questions or remarks with **ought** may be answered by **should** and vice versa:

*You ought to put in central heating. ~ Yes, I suppose I should.*

### 140 should: forms

**should** is also a modal verb.

Like **ought**, the same form can be used for present and future and for the past when preceded by a verb in a past tense, **should** could replace **ought** to in the above examples.

Negative: *should not/shouldn't*

Interrogative: *should I?* etc.

Negative interrogative: *should I not/shouldn't I?* etc.

**should** is followed by the bare infinitive.

**should** and **ought**, used for obligation, normally have the same meaning but **should** is the more usual form.

In conversation **should/ought to** can often be used alone, the infinitive being understood but not mentioned:

*You should paint/ought to paint your door. ~ Yes, I know I should/ I know I ought to.*

### 141 ought/should compared to must and have to

A Differences in use

1 **ought/should** is used to express the subject's obligation or duty:

You should send in accurate income tax returns

or to indicate a correct or sensible action:

*They shouldn't allow parking here; the street is too narrow.*

*This word is spelt wrongly. There should be another 's'.*

Here there is neither the speaker's authority, as with **must**, or external authority, as with **have to** (see 145). It is more a matter of conscience or good sense:

*PIANIST TO PUPIL: You must practise at least an hour a day.*

*PUPIL TO MUSICAL FRIEND: I have to practise an hour a day!*

*MUSICAL FRIEND: You ought to/should practise for more than an hour.*

2 Another difference between **ought/should** and **must** and **have to** is that with **must** and **have to** we normally have the impression that the obligation is being or will be fulfilled. This is particularly the case with the first person but quite often applies to the other persons too. With **ought/should** we do not necessarily feel that the obligation is being or will be fulfilled. Quite often, especially in the first person, the reverse is the case.

If a driver says *I ought to/should go slowly here; it's a built-up area* he usually implies that he isn't going to go slowly. If he really intended to go slowly he would say, *I must go/I have to go/I will have to go slowly here.*

Similarly, if someone says *We must have a party to celebrate your engagement*, his friends are reasonably confident that there will be a party. But if he says *We should have a party ...* it is not so certain that the party will take place. His tone or expression might indicate that it will not be possible.

- B Similarities in use
- 1 **should** (but not **ought**) can be used in formal notices and on information sheets etc.:  
*Candidates should be prepared to answer questions on . . .*  
*Intending travellers should be in possession of the following documents . . .*  
*On hearing the alarm bell, hotel guests should leave their rooms . . .*  
**must** could be used here without change of meaning, but **should** expresses the obligation more gently.
- 2 **ought** and **should** can express advice:  
*You ought to/should read this. It's very good.*  
 But for more emphatic advice **must** is better:

You must read this. It's marvellous!

142 **ought/should with the continuous infinitive**

**ought/should** with the continuous infinitive expresses the idea that the subject is not fulfilling his obligations or that he is acting foolishly, rashly etc- or not acting sensibly, prudently etc.:  
*He ought to be studying for his exam. He shouldn't be spending all his time on the beach.*  
*We should be wearing seat belts. (But we are not wearing them.)*  
*I shouldn't be telling you this. It's supposed to be a secret.*

143 **ought/should with the perfect infinitive**

This construction is used to express an unfulfilled obligation or a sensible action that was neglected. In the negative it expresses a wrong or foolish action in the past,  
*You ought to have told him that the paint on that seat was wet.*  
*You should have turned his omelette; he likes it turned.*  
*They ought to have stopped at the traffic lights.*  
*She shouldn't have opened the letter; it wasn't addressed to her.*  
*The Emergency Exit doors shouldn't have been blocked.*

144 **must and have to: forms**

- A **must**  
**must** is a modal verb (see 107 B). It is used in the present or future.  
 Negative: *must not/mustn't*  
 Interrogative: *must I?* etc.  
 Negative interrogative: *must I not/mustn't I?* etc.  
 The past tense is supplied by *had to*.  
**must** takes the bare infinitive.  
 It can express obligation and emphatic advice:  
*FATHER: You must get up earlier in the morning. (obligation)*  
*You must take more exercise. Join a squash club. (advice)*

B **have to**

	<u>Obligation</u>		<u>No obligation</u>
	Speaker's Authority	External authority	
Future	must	shall/will have to	shan't/won't have to
Present	must	have to*	don't/doesn't have to*
		have (got) to*	haven't (got) to*
Past	had to	had to	didn't have to
			hadn't (got) to

\*See C below.

C Difference between the starred **have to** forms

**have to** (without **got**) and its negative **don't/doesn't have to** are the correct forms for habitual actions but can be used for single actions also, and are common in American English.

**have (got) to** and **haven't (got) to** are for single actions only:

TOM: / have to go to work every day except Sunday. But I don't have to work a full day on Saturday.

*But on Sunday he could say:*

*I'm glad I haven't (got) to go to work today or*

*I'm glad I don't have to go to work today.*

In the past **didn't have to** can be used for both habitual and single actions in the past.

**hadn't (got) to** is used more for single actions.

**didn't have to** is the more generally used form.

**have to** in the affirmative expresses obligation.

**have to** in the negative expresses absence of obligation. This can also be expressed by **need not, don't need** etc. (see 149).

145 **Difference between must and have to in the affirmative**

A **must** expresses obligation imposed by the speaker:

*MOTHER: You must wipe your feet when you come in.*

**have to** expresses external obligation:

*SMALL BOY: I have to wipe my feet every time I come in.*

B Second person examples

1 Speaker's authority

*MOTHER: You must wear a dress tonight. You can't go to the opera in those dreadful jeans.*

*EMPLOYER: You must use a dictionary. I'm tired of correcting your spelling mistakes.*

*DOCTOR: You must cut down on your smoking.*

2 External authority

*You have to wear uniform on duty, don't you?*

*You have to train very hard/or these big matches, I suppose.*

*You'll have to get up earlier when you start work, won't you?*

*You'll have to cross the line by the footbridge.*

C Third person examples

Here **must** is chiefly used in written orders or instructions:

*RAILWAY COMPANY: Passengers must cross the line by the footbridge.*

*OFFICE MANAGER: Staff must be at their desks by 9.00.*

*REGULATION: A trailer must have two rear lamps.*

When we are merely stating or commenting on another person's obligations we use **have to**:

*In this office even the senior staff have to be at their desks by 9.00.*

*She has to make her children's clothes. She can't afford to buy them.*

*They'll have to send a diver down to examine the hull.*

If we used **must** instead of **have to** above it might imply that the speaker had authority to order these actions. But **must** may be used when the speaker approves of an obligation:  
*A driver who has knocked someone down must stop.* (The speaker thinks it is the driver's duty to stop.)

Or when the speaker feels strongly:

*Something must be done to stop these accidents.*

D First person examples

In the first person the difference between **must** and **have to** is less n' important and very often either form is possible:

*TYPIST: / must/will have to buy a dictionary.*

*PATIENT: / must/have to/will have to cut down on my smoking.*

But have to is better for habits:

## I have to take two of these pills a day

and **must** is better when the obligations are urgent or seem important to the speaker:

*I must tell you about a dream I had last night.*

*Before we do anything I must find my cheque book.*

Some other examples (all persons)

*You must come and see us some time.* (This is quite a usual way of expressing a casual invitation.)

*The children have to play in the street till their parents come home.*

*This sort of thing must stop!* (The speaker either has authority or feels very strongly about it.)

*You must write to your uncle and thank him for his nice present.*

*If there are no taxis we'll have to walk.*

*If your father was a poor man you 'd have to work.*

*We have to walk our dog twice a day.*

*NOTICE IN SHOP WINDOW: Closing down sale! Everything must go!*

Affirmative obligations in the past: **had to**

Here the distinction between the speaker's authority and external authority cannot be expressed and there is only one form, **had to**:

*I ran out of money and had to borrow from Tom.*

*You had to Ray duty on that, I suppose?*

*There were no buses so he had to walk.*

### 146 need not and must not in the present and future

**need not** can be used for present and future. It has the same form for all persons, (See 148.) **need not** expresses absence of obligation. The speaker gives permission for an action not to be performed or sometimes merely states that an action is not necessary:

*EMPLOYER: You needn't make two copies. One will do.*

*Give them this cheque. They needn't send me a receipt.*

*You needn't change (your clothes). Just come as you are.*

**must not** expresses a negative obligation imposed by the speaker or very emphatic advice:

*You mustn't repeat this to anyone.*

*NOTICE IN SHOP: Staff must not smoke when serving customers.*

*You mustn't leave your car unlocked. This place is full of thieves.*

### 147 need not, must not and must in the present and future

*DOCTOR: You needn't go on a diet; but you must eat sensibly and you mustn't overeat.*

*ZOO NOTICE: Visitors must not feed the animals.*

*RAILWAY NOTICE: Passengers must not walk on the line.*

*You mustn't drive fast. There is a speed limit here.*

*You needn't drive fast. We've plenty of time.*

*You needn't strike a match. I can see well enough.*

*You mustn't strike a match. This room is full of gas.*

*SCHOOL NOTICE: The lifts must not be used during Fire Drill.*

*You mustn't wear that dress again. You look terrible in yellow.*  
 TEACHER: *You needn't read the whole book but you must read the first four chapters.*  
*You must cut down that dead tree or it will fall on your house.*  
 DOCTOR: *You mustn't take more than two of these pills at once. Three might be fatal.*  
 DOCTOR (to patient's wife): *If the pain has gone he needn't take any more of these.*

148 **need: forms**

- A **need** can be both an auxiliary and an ordinary verb. As an auxiliary it is a semi-modal, i.e. it has both modal and 'ordinary verb' forms. As a modal, its forms are *need or need not/needn't* for all persons in the present and future and in indirect speech. (See C below.)  
 Interrogative: *need I?* etc.  
 Negative interrogative: *need I not/needn't I?* etc.  
**need** conjugated as above takes the bare infinitive.
- B **need** as an auxiliary is seldom used in the affirmative except when a negative or interrogative sentence is preceded by an expression which changes the negative or interrogative verb into an affirmative:  
*I needn't wear a coat or I don't suppose I need wear a coat.*  
*Need I tell Tom? or Do you think I need tell Tom?*  
 It is however sometimes used in fairly formal English with *hardly/scarcely* or *only*:  
*I need hardly say how pleased we are to welcome Mr X. (I needn't say . . .)*  
*You need only touch one of the pictures for all the alarm bells to start ringing. (If you even touch one of the pictures all the bells . . .)*
- C **needn't** in direct speech can be reported unchanged:  
*'You needn't pay till the 31st' he says/said = He says/said I needn't pay till the 31st.*  
 (See also 325 C.)
- D **need** can also be conjugated as an ordinary verb with negative forms as shown in 149 below. Corresponding **have to** forms are also shown. For interrogative forms, see 151.  
**need** conjugated with **will/shall, do/does/did** etc. takes the full infinitive and is sometimes referred to as **need to**.

149 **Absence of obligation; forms**

	<u>Speaker's authority</u>	<u>External authority</u>
Future	need not	shan't/won't need to
Present	need not	shan't/won't have to
		don't/doesn't need to
Past (see 150 B)	didn't need to	don't/doesn't have to
	didn't have to	haven't/hasn't got to
	hadn't got to	

But see 148 C above for needn't in indirect speech.

shan't/won't need to = shan't/won't have to  
 don't/doesn't need to = don't/doesn't have to  
 didn't need to = didn't have to (but didn't have to is the more usual form)

There are no exact *need* equivalents of *haven't/hasn't got to* and *hadn't got to* as can be seen from the table.

150 **Difference between need not and the other forms**

As already stated, **need not** expresses the speaker's authority or advice:

*You needn't write me another cheque, just change the date and initial it.*

*I'm in no hurry. He needn't send it by air. He can send it by sea.*

*You needn't do it by hand. I'll lend you my machine.*

*You needn't call me Mr Jones. We all use first names here.*

*COLLEGE LECTURER: You needn't type your essays but you must write legibly.*

2 The other forms express external authority:

*Tom doesn't have to wear uniform at school.*

*We don't have to type our essays but we have to write legibly.*

*When I'm an old age pensioner I won't have to pay any more bus fares.*

*Ann hasn't got to go/doesn't have to go to this lecture. Attendance is optional.*

*When I have a telephone of my own I won't have to waste time waiting outside these wretched telephone boxes.*

*Ann doesn't have to cook for herself. She works at a hotel and gets all her meals there.*

3 Sometimes, however, **need not** can be used for external authority also, as an alternative to **won't/don't need to** or **won't/don't have to** forms. This is particularly common in the first person:

*I needn't type/I won't/don't have to type this report today. Mr Jones said that there was no hurry about it.*

*Note, however, that though it is possible to use need not for a future habitual action:*

*I'm retiring. After Friday I need never go to the office again.*

it is not possible to use it for a present habitual action:

*I don't have to queue for my bus. I get on at the terminus. (need not could not be used here.)*

B Past

Here the distinction between the speaker's authority and external authority disappears, and we have a choice of three forms: **didn't have to**, **didn't need to** and **hadn't got to**. There is no difference in meaning, but **hadn't got to** is not normally used for habitual actions.

**didn't have to** is the most usual form:

*I didn't have to wait long. He was only a few minutes late.*

*When he was at university he didn't have to/need to pay anything for his keep, for he stayed with his uncle.*

151 **must, have to and need in the interrogative**

	Asking the authority	External authority	
Future	must I? etc. need I? etc.	shall I/we have to? will he etc. have to?	shall I/we need to? will he etc. need to?
Present	must I? etc. need I? Etc.	do I etc. have to? does he etc. have to? have I etc. (got) to? has he etc. (got) to?	do I etc. need to? does he etc. need to?
Past		did he etc. have to? did he etc. need to? had he etc. gel to?	

Both **need?** and **must?** imply that the person addressed is the authority concerned. **need?** also implies that the speaker is hoping for a negative answer: *Must I go, mother?* and *Need I go, mother?* mean the same, but in the second question the speaker is hoping that his mother will say *No*. The other interrogative form of need, *do I need?* etc., can be used similarly. Note possible answers:

*Shall I have to go? ~ Yes, you will/No, you won't.*

*Have I got to go? ~ Yes, you have/No, you haven't.*

*Does he have to go? ~ Yes, he does/No, he doesn't.*

*Need I go? ~ Yes, you must/No, you needn't.*

*Must I go? ~ Yes, you must/No, you needn't.*

152 **needn't + perfect infinitive**

This structure is used to express an unnecessary action which was nevertheless performed:

*I needn't have written to him because he phoned me shortly afterwards. (But I had written, thus wasting my time.)*

*You needn't have brought your umbrella for we are going by car. (You brought your umbrella unnecessarily.)*

*He needn't have left home at 6.00; the train doesn't start till 7.30. (So he will have an hour to wait.)*

153 **needn't have (done) compared with didn't have/ need (to do)**

**needn't have done:** no obligation but action performed (unnecessarily), i.e. time wasted:

*You needn't have watered the flowers, for it is going to rain. (You wasted your time.)*

*You needn't have written such a long essay. The teacher only asked for 300 words, and you have written 600.*

*He needn't have bought such a large house. His wife would have been quite happy in a cottage. (waste of money)*

*You needn't have carried all these parcels yourself. The shop would have delivered them if you had asked them.*

**didn't have/need to do:** no obligation, and normally no action:

*I didn't have to translate it for him for he understands Dutch.*

*I didn't have to cut the grass myself. My brother did it. (no obligation and no action)*

Some people do use **didn't have to/didn't need to** for actions which were performed. The **have** or **need** is then usually stressed: *You didn't have to give him my name* would then mean "It wasn't necessary to give him my name, but you gave it to him". But the student is

advised to use **needn't have** + past participle when an unnecessary action was performed:

*You needn't have given him my name.*

154 **needn't, could and should + perfect infinitive**

A **needn't** + perfect infinitive is often combined with **could** + perfect infinitive. The use of this combination is best shown by examples:

*I wanted a copy of the letter, so I typed it twice. ~ You needn't have typed it twice. You could have used a carbon.*

*I walked up six/lights of stairs. ~ You needn't have walked up; you could have taken the lift.*

*She stood in a queue to get an Underground ticket. ~ But she needn't have stood in a queue. She could have got a ticket from the machine.*

B **needn't have** and **should have** compared

**should** or **ought to** could be used instead of need or could in all the examples in A above:

*She shouldn't have stood in a queue. She should have got tickets from the machine.*

But there is a difference in meaning:

*She shouldn't have stood in a queue. (It was wrong or foolish of her to stand in a queue.)*

*She needn't have stood in a queue. (It was not necessary to do this, but she did it.)*

**shouldn't have** (done) implies criticism.

**needn't have** (done) does not imply criticism.

155 **to need** as an ordinary verb, meaning 'require'

As shown in 149, **need** can be conjugated as an ordinary verb. It then has the normal regular forms, but no continuous tense.

**to need** can be used with an infinitive or with a noun/pronoun object;

*I need to know the exact size.*

*How much money do you need? I need £5.*

**to need** can also be used with the passive infinitive or the gerund in such sentences as:

*Your hair needs to be cut/needs cutting.*

*The windows need to be washed/need washing.*

**want** + gerund can be used instead of need here:

*Your hair wants cutting.*