

Need(n't), don't need to and don't have to

Reminder → C25–C28

A

We can use **need** as an ordinary or a modal verb (followed by a bare infinitive). As a modal verb it doesn't change its tense and doesn't add '-s' for the third person singular. Compare:

- I **needed** to leave early. or She's thirsty. She **needs** a drink. (= ordinary verb) and
- You **needn't** *speak* so loudly. (= modal verb)

When it is a modal verb **need** is most commonly used in negative sentences:

- I've already cleaned the car so you **needn't** *bother* to do it.
- I was very nervous before the interview, but I **needn't** *have worried* – I got the job!

Other verbs often used with need not (needn't): apply, concern, fear, involve, mean, panic

It is sometimes used in questions, but we prefer to use **need** as an ordinary verb or **have to**:

- Need** you **go** so soon? (= modal verb; less common and rather formal)
- Do** you **need to go** so soon? (= ordinary verb) or **Do** you **have to go** so soon?

It is rarely used in affirmative sentences (that is, not questions or negatives), but is sometimes found in written English, particularly in fiction:

- We **need** *have* no fear for Nicole, she can take care of herself.

In other styles of formal written English it is used in this way with negative words such as **hardly**, **never**, **nobody** / **no one**, and **only**:

- The changes **need** *only* be small to make the proposals acceptable. (*less formally* The changes only need to be ...)
- Nobody* ever **need** know about the money. (*less formally* Nobody ever needs to know ...)
- 'I don't want my parents to know.' 'They **need** *never* find out.' (*less formally* They never need to find out.)

B

To give permission not to do something we can use either **needn't** or **don't need to**:

- You **needn't** *cut* the grass, I'll do it later. (or You **don't need to** *cut* the grass ...)

To talk about a general necessity, we prefer **don't need to**:

- You **don't need to be** over 18 to get into a nightclub. (*rather than* You *needn't* be ...)

C

We can often use either **needn't** or **don't have to** with little difference in meaning to say that it is unnecessary to do something:

- You **needn't** whisper. Nobody can hear us. (or You **don't have to** ...)

However, some people prefer **needn't** when it is the speaker who decides the lack of necessity, and **don't have to** when somebody else or external rules make something unnecessary. Compare:

- As you worked late yesterday you **needn't** come in until ten tomorrow morning. (the speaker's decision) and
- We've been told that we **don't have to** be at work until ten tomorrow. (reporting someone else's decision.)

D

We can use **needn't** (or **don't have to**) to say that something is not necessarily true. We don't use **mustn't** in this way (see also Unit 18C):

- Volcanoes **needn't** erupt constantly to be classified as 'active'. (or Volcanoes **don't have to** erupt ...; *not* Volcanoes **mustn't** erupt ...)
- Nowadays it **needn't** cost a fortune to own an e-book reader. (or Nowadays it **doesn't have to** cost ...; *not* Nowadays it **mustn't** cost ...)

Exercises

19.1 Match the sentence beginnings and ends. Join them with **needn't** and the bare infinitive of one of the verbs from the box. **A**

bother change concern panic worry

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1 I'll give you a lift to the station so you ... | ... the details on the form. |
| 2 The questions are in the book so you ... | ... yourself with viruses. |
| 3 All the windows have screens so you ... | ... to copy them down. |
| 4 Our software provides full computer security so you ... | ... about booking a taxi. |
| 5 The new tax laws don't come into force until next year so you ... | ... about being bitten by mosquitoes. |

19.2 Rewrite the following in a formal style using **need**. **A**

- It is hardly necessary for us to remind you that the money is now due.
We need hardly remind you that the money is now due.
- It is only necessary for us to look at the rainfall figures to see the seriousness of the problem.
- With such a lead in the opinion polls it is hardly necessary for the Democrats to bother campaigning before the election.
- It is not necessary for anyone to know who paid the ransom to the kidnappers.
- After such a huge lottery win, it is not necessary for him to work again.

19.3 Underline the more likely option. If the options are equally likely, underline them both. **B**

- In most developed countries, people *needn't* / *don't need to* boil water before they drink it.
- You *needn't* / *don't need to* walk. I'll give you a lift.
- I'll email a summary of the lecture so you *needn't* / *don't need to* take notes.
- You *needn't* / *don't need to* have a university degree to become a police officer.
- You *needn't* / *don't need to* buy me a birthday present.
- In most cities you *needn't* / *don't need to* pay to get into the galleries and museums.

19.4 Correct any mistakes in the extracts from a speech made by the managing director of a company to her employees. **A-D**

1 You needn't to worry about losing your jobs.

2 Need we make any changes in company policy?

3 Changes in technology mustn't be a problem, but in fact provide opportunities.

4 I don't have to remind you that we are competing with two other companies.

5 I need hardly to tell you how important it is that we get this order.

6 You don't have to cancel your holiday plans.

7 We mustn't allow our rate of production to drop.

8 The present financial difficulties mustn't mean that people will lose their jobs.