

Student Notes: Must and Have To

Understanding Must and Have To

At the pre-intermediate level, **must** and **have to** can be used as synonyms to express obligation. However, there are some differences in how we use them.

- **Have to** is more common when talking about external obligations, such as laws or rules.
 - Example: You have to wear a seat belt in a car in many states in the US.
- **Must** is often used for personal obligations or strong recommendations.
 - Example: I must finish my homework before going out.

Common Mistake

I must to go to the bank. → **Incorrect** I must go to the bank. → **Correct**

Remember: **must** is never followed by “to.”

Using “You” for General Rules and Laws

When talking about laws and rules, we often use **you** in an impersonal way.

- You have to drive on the right in the US.
- You have to show your passport at the airport.

Must Not / Can't vs. Don't Have To

It is important to distinguish between prohibition (**must not / can't**) and lack of necessity (**don't have to**).

- **Must not / Can't** → Used to express prohibition (something is not allowed)
 - Example: You must not smoke in the hospital.
 - Example: You can't park here.
- **Don't have to** → Used to express that something is not necessary
 - Example: You don't have to wear a uniform at this school.
 - Example: You don't have to pay for the water; it's free.

Common Mistake

You don't have to use your phone in class. → **Incorrect (sounds like permission)** You must not use your phone in class. → **Correct (a rule or prohibition)**

More Examples

Obligation

- I have to wake up early for work. (External obligation – my job requires it)
- You have to renew your passport before it expires. (A law or rule)
- I must call my mother today. (Personal obligation – I feel it is necessary)

Prohibition

- You must not touch the paintings in the museum.
- You can't enter the building without a security pass.

Lack of Necessity

- You don't have to bring food; we will provide lunch.
- I don't have to work on Saturdays.