Grammar

1   **Obligation and necessity**

We use the verbs *must, have to,* and *need to* to express obligation or a need to do something. All these verbs have a similar meaning.

   You *must/have to/need to bring* your ticket to the airline office.

Must and *have to*

Both of these verbs express obligation, but there are differences between them:

   * opinion or statement of fact

   When it is our personal opinion that something is important, we use *must* more frequently.

   My office files are a mess. I must organize them better.
   My grandfather is visiting me. You must meet him.

   When we are stating a fact instead of giving a personal opinion, we use *have to* more frequently.

   Elaine works on the 6th floor She has to take the elevator to get to her office.
   I have to travel a lot in my job.

   * written or spoken rules

   When we write rules or instructions, we usually use *must.*
   Applications for the secretarial position must arrive before 5:00 Thursday afternoon.

   When we discuss rules, we usually use *have to.*
   They have to give me three weeks notice if they decide to lay me off.

   * tense

   We can only use *must* to talk about obligation in the present tense.
   You must read over the contract.

   We can use *have to* in all tense forms.

   She had to read over the contract.
   How many employees have you had to lay off?
   We'll have to finish this project tomorrow.

Mustn't and *don't have to*

The meaning of *mustn't* is different from the meaning of *don't have to.*
You mustn't park in the reserved or handicapped space. (= Do not park in the reserved or handicapped space. You are not allowed to park there.)
You don't have to park in the reserved or handicapped space. (= It is not necessary for you to park in the *reserved or handicapped space*. It is optional, so you can if you want to.)
This liquid is very acidic. We mustn't spill it.

The plant tour is optional. We don't have to go on it.

Need to

Need to indicates that it is necessary for someone to do something. The meaning is similar to *must.*
You need to go to school.

When something needs to be done, we often use the verb + *-ing.*
The office needs redesigning.

We use the negative form to indicate that something is not necessary. The meaning is the same as *don't have to.*
You don't need to attend the PTA meeting. = You don't have to attend the PTA meeting.

2   **Orders and advice**

We use the verbs *must, had better ('d better), should, ought to,* and *could* to give orders or advice.
You must finish this diagram before our annual meeting. (= an order or very strong advice)
You'd better read through the company rules. (= strong advice)
You should fix your odometer. (= advice)
You ought to wear a raincoat. (= advice)
You could call the technician to fix your computer. (= mild advice or a suggestion)

The negative forms *had better not, should not,* and *ought not to* are used to give advice against doing something.
You'd better not say anything.
You shouldn't listen to negative people.

We use *should / ought to + have +* past participle to talk about a past action that was or was not a good thing to do.
I should have dressed more appropriately for the office. (It was a good thing to do, but I didn't do it.)
I shouldn't have stayed up late. (It was not a good thing to do, but I did it.)