Unit 32 — Must and have to

a We use must (do) and have to (do) to say that it is necessary to do something. Often it doesn't matter which you use:

- Oh dear, it's later than I thought. I ‖ must / have to ‖ go now.
- You ‖ must / have to ‖ have a passport to visit most foreign countries.

There is sometimes a difference between must and have to. With must the speaker is giving his own feelings, saying what he thinks is necessary:

- I must write to Ann. I haven't written to her for ages. (= The speaker personally feels that he must write to Ann.)
- The government really must do something about unemployment. (= The speaker personally feels that the government must do something.)

With have to the speaker is not giving his own feelings. He is just facts. For example:

- Ann's eyes are not very good. She has to wear glasses for reading.
- A can't meet you on Friday. I have to work.

b You can only use must to talk about the *present* and *future*:

- We must go now.
- Must you leave tomorrow?

Have to can be used in all forms. For example:

- I had to go hospital. (*past*)
- I might have to go to hospital. (*infinitive*)
- Have you ever had to go to hospital. (*present perfect*)

Note that we use do/does/did with have to in present and past questions and negative sentences:

- What do I have to do get a driving licence? (*not* 'have I to do')
- Why did you have to go to hospital? (*not* 'had you to go')
- Tom doesn't have to work on Saturdays. (*not* 'hasn't to work')

c Mustn't and don't have to are completely different. 'You mustn't do something' means: 'it is necessary that you do *not* do it':

- You mustn't tell anyone what I said. (= Don't tell anyone.)
- I promised I'd be in time. I mustn't be late. (= I must be on time.)

See also Unit 33a.

'You don't have to do something' means: 'It is not necessary to do it; you don't need to do it':

- I don't have to wear a suit to work but I usually do.
- She stayed in bed this morning because she didn't have to go to work.

d You can use 'have got to' instead of have to. So you can say:

- I've got to work tomorrow   *or*   I have to work tomorrow.
- When has Tom got to leave?   *or*   When does Tom have to leave?