

# 50 Necessary and unnecessary actions

## *need, needn't, don't have to/need to*



Sorry, I can't come out tonight. I **need to** finish this report for the meeting tomorrow.

You **needn't have** done that report, Celia - the meeting's cancelled.

### 1 *need* as a modal, *need to*

*Need* can be a modal verb (► Unit 46), but the only modal forms that we use are *needn't* and *needn't + have + past participle*:

You **needn't leave yet**, it's early. You **needn't have done** that report.

We generally prefer to use *need to*, which is a regular verb, with the usual verb changes:

You **need to leave now**. **Do I need to buy** batteries?

She **does not (doesn't) need to do it**. We **didn't need to charge** the battery.

*need + -ing/infinitive* ► Units 67.4 and 85.4

### 2 Necessary actions

We can use *need to*

- to say that something is physically necessary: *I'm tired. I **need to get** some sleep.*
- when we believe that something is necessary or important: *He really **needs to lose** weight.*
- to mean *have to* (► Unit 49): *You **need to score** 60% to pass the exam.*

PAST *Jane's condition was quite serious. She **needed to stay** in the hospital overnight.*

FUTURE *You'll **need to get** some photos for this passport application.*

### 3 Unnecessary actions, present and future

We use *needn't/don't need to*, *don't have to* or *haven't got to* to say that something isn't necessary or isn't a rule:

You **needn't take** any food - lunch is provided. (It isn't necessary.)

You **don't need to buy** a battery - it already has one.

Men **don't have to do** military service in Britain. (It isn't a rule.)

There's no rush. We **haven't got to leave** yet.

We use *won't need to* or *won't have to* for unnecessary future actions:

You **won't need to bring** any extra money on Friday, everything is included in the price.

I **won't have to wait** for long; the bus comes every ten minutes.

### 4 Unnecessary actions in the past

We use *didn't need to* or *didn't have to* to say that something wasn't necessary in the past.

We don't know if the action happened or not:

The pain went away so I **didn't need to see** a doctor. We **didn't have to pay** - it was free.

We use *needn't + have + past participle* to say that an action happened in the past although it wasn't necessary:

You **needn't have brought** a camera. You can use mine.

You **needn't have gone** to a photographer's. There's a photo machine at the station.

Compare:

Carol **needn't have taken** a towel. The gym provides them free of charge.

(Carol took a towel but it wasn't necessary.)

Carol **didn't need to take** a towel. The gym provides them free of charge.

(We don't know whether Carol took a towel or not.)