

## 357 need

When *need* is followed by another verb, it can have the forms either of an ordinary verb or (in British English) of a modal auxiliary verb.

### 1 ordinary verb

*Need* most often has the same forms as ordinary verbs: the third person singular has -s, and questions and negatives are made with *do*. *Need* is usually followed by an infinitive with *to*.

*Everybody needs to rest sometimes.*

*Do we need to reserve seats on the train?*

### 2 modal auxiliary verb

In British English, *need* can also have the same present-tense forms as modal auxiliary verbs: the third person singular has no -s, and questions and negatives are made without *do*. In this case, *need* is normally followed by an infinitive without *to*.

*We needn't reserve seats – there'll be plenty of room.*

These modal forms are used mainly in negative sentences, but they are also possible in questions, after *if*, and in other 'non-assertive' structures (see 374).

*You needn't fill in a form. Need I fill in a form?*

*I wonder if I need fill in a form. This is the only form you need fill in.*

(BUT NOT ~~*You need fill in a form.*~~)

Modal forms of *need* normally refer to immediate necessity. They are often used to ask for or give permission – usually permission not to do something. Modal verb forms are not used to talk about habitual, general necessity.

Compare:

*It's OK – You needn't pay for that phone call.*

(OR ... *You don't need to pay for that phone call.*)

*You don't need to pay for emergency calls in most countries.*

(NOT ~~*You needn't pay ... in most countries.*~~)

Modal forms of *need* are rare in American English.

### 3 talking about the future

Present tense forms of *need* are used when making decisions about the future.

*Need I come in tomorrow? Tell her she doesn't need to work tonight.*

*Will need to ...* can be used to talk about future obligation, and give advice for the future. It can make orders and instructions sound less direct.

*We'll need to repair the roof next year.*

*You'll need to start work soon if you want to pass your exams.*

*You'll need to fill in this form before you see the Inspector.*

For similar uses of *have to*, see 243.3.

### 4 need ...ing

After *need* an -ing form can be used in British English, with the same meaning as a passive infinitive.

*That sofa needs cleaning again. (= ... needs to be cleaned ...)*

A structure with **object + ...ing** is also possible in some cases.

*You need your head examining. (OR ... examined.)* ►