Modal Verbs for Obligation, Prohibition and Permission — B2

CEFR Level B2 | 3 Worksheets: Beyond Must and Have To • Register, Politeness and Force • Transformation and Writing | Answer Key Included

Worksheet 1: Beyond Must and Have To

Name: _____ *Date:* _____ *Level: B2 (CEFR)*

Reference: The Wider Inventory

At B2 the core system is assumed. What distinguishes an upper-intermediate speaker is the ability to select a form that encodes the *source* of the obligation and the speaker's attitude to it.

Form	Notes	Example
be supposed to	A rule that is often broken; implies a gap between rule and practice	We're **supposed to** log every call. (Nobody does.)
be meant to	Similar to "supposed to"; slightly more about intention	This **was meant to** be finished last week.
be required to	Formal, institutional; typical of regulations	Applicants **are required to** submit two references.
be obliged to	Formal; often implies reluctance	The board **was obliged to** resign.
be to + inf	Official instruction; newspapers, orders	All staff **are to** report to the main hall.
have got to	Informal, urgent; not used in the past	I've **got to** finish this tonight.
be permitted / entitled to	Formal permission vs a *right*	Employees **are entitled to** 28 days' leave.
may / may not	Formal permission and prohibition	Candidates **may not** use dictionaries.
shall (legal)	Imposes a duty in contracts and statutes	The tenant **shall** maintain the property.
needn't have + pp	It was done — unnecessarily	You **needn't have waited**.
didn't need to + inf	It wasn't necessary — usually not done	I **didn't need to wait**, so I left.

Exercise A: Source and Attitude

For each sentence, identify who imposes the obligation and what the speaker's attitude to it is.

1. "We're supposed to wear ID badges."
   Source: _____ Attitude: _____
2. "Staff are required to wear ID badges."
   Source: _____ Attitude: _____
3. "You've got to wear an ID badge, I'm afraid."
   Source: _____ Attitude: _____
4. "All personnel are to wear ID badges at all times."
   Source: _____ Attitude: _____
5. "I really must get one of those ID badges."
   Source: _____ Attitude: _____

Exercise B: Complete the Sentences

#	Sentence
1	Under the terms of the lease, the tenant _____ not sublet the property.
2	You _____ have brought a present — it's far too generous of you. (but you did)
3	We _____ to submit the report by Monday, but everyone files late.

#	Sentence
4	Full-time employees _____ to twenty-eight days' paid leave.
5	I _____ have rushed — the meeting was cancelled an hour before. (but I rushed)
6	Passengers _____ to remain seated until the aircraft has come to a stop.
7	I _____ get to the bank before it closes. (informal, urgent)
8	She _____ to resign after the report was published. (formal, reluctant)

Exercise C: Error Analysis

Correct the error and explain the rule violated.

1. "You needn't have booked a table, so we just walked in."
   Correction: _____
   Rule: _____
2. "I've got to renew my passport last month."
   Correction: _____
   Rule: _____
3. "The candidates must to submit the form in duplicate."
   Correction: _____
   Rule: _____
4. "We were supposed to finishing by five."
   Correction: _____
   Rule: _____
5. "He didn't need to pay the fine, but he paid it anyway and never got it back."
   Correction: _____
   Rule: _____

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 2: Register, Politeness and Force

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: B2 (CEFR)

Part A – The Same Instruction, Six Ways

An advanced speaker adjusts the force of an instruction to the relationship and the setting. The content below is constant; only the packaging changes.

Instruction: the reader is to stop parking in the loading bay.

Write the instruction for each context. Do not repeat a structure.

1. A handwritten note left on a colleague's windscreen

   _____

   Structure chosen and why: _____

2. A formal notice fixed to the wall of the bay

   _____

   Structure chosen and why: _____

3. An email from the facilities manager to all staff

   _____

   Structure chosen and why: _____

4. A quiet word from a friend who has noticed

   _____

   Structure chosen and why: _____

5. A final written warning from HR

   _____

   Structure chosen and why: _____

6. A council by-law

   _____

   Structure chosen and why: _____

Part B – Softening and Hardening

The force of an obligation can be adjusted without changing the modal, using hedges (*I'm afraid, perhaps, if you could*), passives, and impersonal constructions.

Rewrite each instruction twice: once as softly as possible, once as forcefully as possible. Do not change the content.

1. "Send me the figures."
   Softest: _____
   Hardest: _____
2. "Don't use the front entrance."
   Softest: _____
   Hardest: _____
3. "You have to work this weekend."
   Softest: _____
   Hardest: _____
4. "Stop interrupting."
   Softest: _____
   Hardest: _____

Part C – Reading: Rules and Their Enforcement

Read the passage and answer the questions.

Every office has two sets of rules: the ones written down and the ones that are actually enforced. Employees are required to book meeting rooms in advance; in practice, you're supposed to book them, and everybody knows that the third-floor room is Marcus's on Tuesdays whatever the system says. New staff needn't worry about this — it is explained to them within a week, though never in writing. What they mustn't do is book over Marcus. They don't have to like the arrangement; they merely have to live with it. Management is entitled to enforce the written rule at any time and has never once been obliged to.

1. Identify every obligation, prohibition or permission structure. Group them into **written rules** and **unwritten rules**.

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_____

2. The writer shifts from **are required to** to **you're supposed to** within one sentence. What does this shift do?

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3. Explain the difference between **don't have to like** and **have to live with** in the same sentence. Why are both needed?

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4. **Is entitled to** and **has never been obliged to** close the passage. What is the writer implying about power?

_____

_____

5. The passage never states a penalty. How does the modality alone communicate that booking over Marcus is dangerous?

_____

_____

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 3: Transformation and Extended Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: B2 (CEFR)

Part A – Sentence Transformation

Rewrite each sentence using the word given. Do not change the meaning. Use between three and six words.

1. "It was unnecessary for you to bring wine, although we enjoyed it." *(NEEDN'T)*
   → _____
2. "It wasn't necessary for me to attend, so I stayed at home." *(NEED)*
   → _____
3. "The regulations oblige all visitors to sign in." *(REQUIRED)*
   → _____
4. "Nobody forced her to resign — she chose to." *(OBLIGED)*
   → _____
5. "Everyone knows we should file these weekly, but nobody does." *(SUPPOSED)*
   → _____
6. "Staff have a right to a thirty-minute break." *(ENTITLED)*
   → _____
7. "It is forbidden for candidates to bring notes into the hall." *(MAY)*
   → _____
8. "You are strongly advised to leave now, or you will miss it." *(BETTER)*
   → _____

Part B – Rewriting a Document

The notice below was written by someone with no ear for register. It is simultaneously rude and unclear.

> ***NOTICE TO ALL RESIDENTS.*** *You mustn't put rubbish out before 7pm. You needn't use the green bins for garden waste but it is better. You are obliged to break down cardboard. You don't have to leave bins on the pavement after collection — take them in. You must not to block the fire door with anything. Residents shall be responsible for their own bins.*

Rewrite the notice (60–80 words) so that it is (i) grammatically correct, (ii) consistent in register, and (iii) unambiguous about what is compulsory, forbidden and optional. Then list the three errors of meaning you corrected — not just the grammar.

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Errors of meaning corrected:

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Part C – Extended Writing

Write **150–180 words** on ONE of the following. Use at least **six** distinct structures (underline them). Your register must be consistent throughout.

Topic A: "Rules that are never enforced are worse than no rules at all." Discuss.

Topic B: Describe an obligation in your own life that you resent but comply with. Explain why you comply.

Topic C: Write the code of conduct for a workplace you would actually want to work in.

My topic: ___ A ___ B ___ C

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Word count: _____ Structures used: _____ / 6

Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — B2 Level Worksheets

Worksheet 1 – Exercise A (Source and Attitude)

#	Item	Answer / guidance
1	we're supposed to	Source: an institutional rule. Attitude: **detached, faintly sceptical**. "Supposed to" almost always signals that the rule is not fully observed — the speaker is distancing themselves from it.
2	are required to	Source: formal regulation. Attitude: **neutral, official**. The speaker reports the rule without commenting on it. Typical of HR documents and signage.
3	you've got to	Source: outside, but the speaker is relaying it. Attitude: **sympathetic** — "I'm afraid" marks the speaker as an ally, not the enforcer.
4	are to	Source: direct authority. Attitude: **impersonal command**. "Be to" is the voice of the institution itself; there is no room to negotiate.
5	I really must	Source: **the speaker** — self-imposed. Nobody is compelling them. Note that "must" with a first-person subject is almost always internal.

Worksheet 1 – Exercise B (Gap Fill)

#	Answer	Why
1	may / shall	Legal register — "may not" is the standard prohibition in contracts.
2	needn't	"But you did" = needn't have brought.
3	are supposed	The gap between rule and practice is explicit.
4	are entitled	A right, not a permission.
5	needn't	I rushed, and it was unnecessary.
6	are required / are	"are to remain" or "are required to remain" — official instruction.
7	've got to	Informal and urgent.
8	was obliged	Formal + reluctance.

Worksheet 1 – Exercise C (Errors)

#	Error	Correction & rule
1	needn't have booked, so we walked in	**We didn't need to book, so we just walked in.** — "Needn't have" entails the action WAS performed; the second clause contradicts it.
2	I've got to … last month	**I had to renew my passport last month.** — "Have got to" has no past form. The past of all obligation is "had to".
3	must to submit	**must submit** — no "to" after must.
4	supposed to finishing	**were supposed to finish** — "supposed to" takes the bare infinitive.
5	didn't need to pay, but he paid	**He needn't have paid the fine.** — Since he DID pay, "needn't have" is required. "Didn't need to" implies he did not pay, which the rest of the sentence contradicts.

Worksheet 2 – Part A (Six Registers)

Assess the *fit* between structure and context, not correctness. Models:

Context	Model + rationale
Windscreen note	"You're not supposed to park here! — Facilities will tow." — Informal; "supposed to" is peer-to-peer, not authority.

Context	Model + rationale
Formal notice	"Vehicles may not be parked in this bay at any time." — Passive + "may not": the standard prohibition of public signage.
Manager's email	"Please note that staff are required to keep the loading bay clear." — "Required to" reports the rule without personalising the accusation.
A friend's word	"You'd better move it — they've started ticketing." — "Had better" + consequence. This is what genuine helpfulness sounds like.
HR warning	"You are to cease parking in the loading bay with immediate effect." — "Be to": direct, impersonal, unnegotiable. The register of the disciplinary process.
By-law	"No person shall park or cause to be parked any vehicle in a designated loading bay." — Legal *shall* + "no person": the duty is imposed on the world, not on a reader.

Worksheet 2 – Part B (Softening and Hardening)

#	Softest	Hardest
1	I don't suppose you could send those figures over when you get a chance?	I need those figures on my desk by nine.
2	You might find the side door easier, actually.	The front entrance is not to be used.
3	Is there any chance you could cover this weekend? I know it's short notice.	You're working this weekend.
4	Sorry — could I just finish this point?	Do not interrupt me again.

Teaching point: the softest versions frequently contain no obligation modal at all. Genuine politeness in English works by removing the obligation from the surface — turning a demand into a question about ability or willingness. Learners who "soften" by adding "please" to an imperative have missed the mechanism.

Worksheet 2 – Part C (Reading)

#	Answer
1	**Written:** are required to book · mustn't book over Marcus (arguably unwritten) · is entitled to enforce · shall/may (implied). **Unwritten:** you're supposed to book · needn't worry · mustn't book over Marcus · don't have to like · have to live with · has never been obliged to. The point of the exercise is that the boundary is contested — reward students who argue about where "mustn't book over Marcus" belongs.
2	It moves from the institution's voice to the office's voice within a single breath. "Are required to" is what the handbook says; "you're supposed to" is what a colleague tells you. The shift enacts the passage's whole argument — that the two rule systems coexist and the second one governs.
3	"Don't have to like" removes an obligation that could never have existed anyway (nobody can be compelled to like something) — so it is ironic. "Have to live with" imposes a real one. The pairing produces the passage's bleakest joke: your feelings are free, your behaviour is not. Both are needed because the contrast IS the meaning.
4	Power that never needs to be used is the most complete kind. "Is entitled to" establishes that management holds the right; "has never once been obliged to" reveals that the unwritten system enforces the rule for them. The written rule functions as a threat in reserve. Note "obliged" here means "compelled by circumstance", not "required by a superior" — management is the top of the hierarchy, so nobody could oblige them.
5	Through contrast alone. Everything else in the passage is hedged, optional or ignorable — *supposed to*, *needn't*, *don't have to*. "What they mustn't do" is the only absolute prohibition in the text, and it is fronted for emphasis. The reader infers the penalty from the sudden change in modal force, not from any stated consequence.

Worksheet 3 – Part A (Transformation)

#	Answer
1	You **needn't have brought** wine.
2	I **didn't need to attend**.
3	All visitors **are required to sign** in.

#	Answer
4	She **wasn't obliged to resign**.
5	We **are supposed to file** these weekly.
6	Staff **are entitled to** a thirty-minute break.
7	Candidates **may not bring** notes into the hall.
8	You'**d better leave now**.

Worksheet 3 – Part B (Rewriting the Notice)

The three errors of meaning (not grammar):

#	Error	Explanation
1	"You needn't use the green bins … but it is better"	Contradictory. If it is better, it is advice: **should**. "Needn't" grants an exemption the next clause withdraws.
2	"You don't have to leave bins on the pavement after collection — take them in."	Backwards. The intended meaning is a prohibition or instruction: **mustn't leave** them out, or simply **must take them in**. "Don't have to" makes it optional, which is the opposite of the dash that follows.
3	"Residents shall be responsible…"	Register clash. Legal *shall* in a residents' notice is pompous and, next to "you mustn't", incoherent. Choose one voice.

Model rewrite: "Please do not put rubbish out before 7pm. Garden waste should go in the green bins. All cardboard must be broken down. Please take your bins in after collection — they must not be left on the pavement. The fire door must be kept clear at all times. Residents are responsible for their own bins."
(Grammar fixed: "must not to block" → "must not block"; "supposed to finishing" pattern avoided. Register unified as polite-institutional throughout.)

Marking Guide — Extended Writing (Worksheet 3 Part C)

Criterion	Descriptor	Marks
Range	Six or more distinct structures used accurately	0–5
Precision	Source and force of each obligation are correctly encoded	0–4
Form	needn't have / didn't need to distinguished; no "to" after must; had to for past	0–3
Register	Consistent; no leakage between legal, institutional and conversational voices	0–3

Teacher Notes — Common B2 Problems

- **needn't have vs didn't need to** is the B2 equivalent of the A2 mustn't/don't-have-to trap. The former entails the action happened; the latter usually entails it didn't. Most learners — and many native speakers — use them interchangeably.
- **"Supposed to" is an attitude marker, not a neutral obligation.** Learners use it as a synonym for "have to" and unwittingly signal scepticism about rules they meant to endorse. This is a pragmatic error, invisible in a gap-fill and obvious in a job interview.
- **Politeness is not addition, it is removal.** The Part B exercise is the key one: English softens obligations by converting them into questions about ability ("Could you…?") or by deleting the agent, not by adding "please" to a command.
- **Register leakage.** B2 writers mix legal *shall*, institutional *are required to* and conversational *you've got to* in the same paragraph. The Part B notice rewrite targets this directly.
- **"Have got to" has no past and no future.** Learners produce "I've got to do it yesterday" / "I'll have got to". Everything outside the present goes to *have to*.
- **Towards C1:** the next step is recognising that obligation and certainty share the same forms (*must*, *should*, *may*) and that ambiguity between them is systematic — "She should be there by now" is either advice or a deduction.