



ENGLISH GRAMMAR MADE CLEAR

Question Formation

How to ask clear, correct questions: word order, auxiliaries, subject questions, indirect questions and question tags.

Where do you work?**Who** called?Could you tell me **where it is**?

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“Sound as capable in English as you are in your own language.”

Melissa B. Duarte · Business English for international professionals · duartebusinessenglish.com

How do we form questions?

In English, questions usually **change the word order**: we put an **auxiliary verb** (*do, be, have, can, will...*) before the subject. The rule is easy to explain but hard to use automatically, especially if in your language you make a question just by changing your intonation.

YES / NO QUESTIONS

Aux + subject + verb?

The answer is yes or no.

Do you work here?

Have you finished?

WH- QUESTIONS

Wh- + aux + subject + verb?

We ask for information.

Where do you live?

When did she leave?

INDIRECT QUESTIONS

...where it is?

More polite; normal statement word order after the question word.

Do you know **what time it starts?**

Three classic mistakes

X ~~Where you work?~~

✓ Where **do you** work?

X ~~What time the meeting starts?~~

✓ What time **does** the meeting **start?**

X ~~Can you tell me where is the station?~~

✓ Can you tell me where **the station is?**

Why is it so tricky to master?

- You need an auxiliary.** If the sentence doesn't have one (present or past simple), you add *do, does* or *did*.
- The auxiliary goes before the subject.** You *are* ready → **Are** you ready?
- Subject questions are different.** When *who* or *what* is the subject, there's no auxiliary: Who **called?**, not ~~Who did call?~~
- Indirect questions go back to normal order.** Where **is** it? → Do you know where it **is?**
- Prepositions go at the end.** Who are you talking **to?** What's it **about?**

The rules side by side

Direct questions

by tense

- 1 **be: just invert**
Is she in the office? Where are you from?
- 2 **Present simple: do / does + base verb**
Does he speak German?
- 3 **Past simple: did + base verb**
When did you arrive? (~~did you arrived~~)
- 4 **Continuous: be + subject + -ing**
What are you working on?
- 5 **Perfect: have / has + subject + pp**
How long have you worked here?
- 6 **Modals: can, will, should... + subject + verb**
Could you send me the file?
- 7 **Negative questions**
Don't you like it? Why didn't you call?

Subjects & question words

- 1 **Object question → auxiliary**
You called someone. Who?
Who did you call?
- 2 **Subject question → no auxiliary**
Someone called you. Who?
Who called you?
- 3 **What / Which + noun**
What time is it? Which option do you prefer?
- 4 **How + adjective / adverb**
How long...? How often...? How much...? How many...?
- 5 **Whose for possession**
Whose laptop is this?
- 6 **Prepositions at the end**
What are you looking for? Who did you speak to?
- 7 **What ... like?: asking for a description**
What's the new boss like?

The word order formula QASV

Question word

Where · What · Why · How
long

Auxiliary

do · does · did · have · will
· can

Subject

you · she · they · the client

Verb + the rest

work? · decided? · leave
early?

Indirect questions & tags

Indirect questions sound **polite and professional**. Question tags help you **check information** and keep a conversation going.

Indirect questions

polite

1 Start with a polite phrase

Could you tell me...? Do you know...? I was wondering...
Would you mind telling me...?

2 Statement order after the question word

Where is the station? →
Could you tell me where the station is?

3 No do / does / did

What time does it start? →
Do you know what time it starts?

4 Yes / No questions → if / whether

Is the room free? →
Do you know if the room is free?

5 No question mark if the opening isn't a question

I'd like to know when it starts.

Question tags

checking

1 Positive sentence → negative tag

You work in sales, don't you?

2 Negative sentence → positive tag

She isn't here, is she?

3 Use the same auxiliary

They've finished, haven't they? He can drive, can't he?

4 No auxiliary → do / does / did

You met him, didn't you?

5 Special cases

I'm late, aren't I? Let's go, shall we?

6 Intonation

falling ↘ = I'm checking · rising ↗ = a real question

Exercises

1**Put the words in order**

Write the questions with the words in the correct order.

1. you do where work

2. did what time arrive the client

3. been how long you have waiting

4. is working on she what

5. you could me help

6. do how often you travel for work

2**Choose the correct option**

Circle the correct option.

1. Where **does / is** your company have its headquarters?
2. **Did / Were** you at the conference last week?
3. How long **do / have** you known Peter?
4. Who **wrote / did write** this report?
5. What **are / do** you doing this weekend?
6. **Does / Is** she usually work from home?
7. How **many / much** people came to the event?
8. **Whose / Who's** idea was this?

Exercises

3

Subject or object?

Write a question for each answer. The underlined words are the answer.

1. Maria sent the email.

Who

2. Maria sent the email.

What

3. The CEO called me.

Who

4. I called the CEO.

Who

5. Something strange happened at the meeting.

What

6. The meeting is about the new budget.

What

4

Make it polite

Rewrite the questions as indirect questions. Start with the words given.

1. Where is the meeting room?

Could you tell me

2. What time does the train leave?

Do you know

3. Is the manager available?

Do you know

4. How much did it cost?

Can I ask

5. Why was the delivery late?

I'd like to know

Exercises

5

Question tags

Complete with the correct question tag.

1. You work in marketing, _____?
2. She isn't coming, _____?
3. They've signed it, _____?
4. He can speak French, _____?
5. You didn't forget, _____?
6. I'm on the list, _____?
7. Let's start, _____?
8. It was a great meeting, _____?

6

Find the mistake

Some sentences are correct. Tick (✓) the correct ones and rewrite the others correctly.

1. Where you are going? ☐
2. What time the store opens? ☐
3. Who did call you this morning? ☐
4. Did you went to the party? ☐
5. Can you tell me where is the bank? ☐
6. How long have you lived here? ☐

7

Your turn

Write questions to ask a new colleague. Use the words in brackets.

1. (*where / work / before*) _____
2. (*how long / live / here*) _____
3. (*what / enjoy / about the job*) _____

Answer key

1 Put the words in order

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Where do you work? | 2. What time did the client arrive? |
| 3. How long have you been waiting? | 4. What is she working on? |
| 5. Could you help me? | 6. How often do you travel for work? |

2 Choose the correct option

- | | | | | | |
|---------|----------|---------|----------|--------|---------|
| 1. does | 2. Were | 3. have | 4. wrote | 5. are | 6. Does |
| 7. many | 8. Whose | | | | |

3 Subject or object?

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Who sent the email? | 2. What did Maria send ? |
| 3. Who called you? | 4. Who did you call ? |
| 5. What happened at the meeting? | 6. What is the meeting about ? |

4 Make it polite

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Could you tell me where the meeting room is ? | 2. Do you know what time the train leaves ? |
| 3. Do you know if / whether the manager is available ? | 4. Can I ask how much it cost ? |
| 5. I'd like to know why the delivery was late . | |

5 Question tags

- | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1. don't you | 2. is she | 3. haven't they | 4. can't he |
| 5. did you | 6. aren't I | 7. shall we | 8. wasn't it |

6 Find the mistake

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Where are you going? | 2. What time does the store open ? |
| 3. Who called you this morning? | 4. Did you go to the party? |
| 5. Can you tell me where the bank is ? | 6. ✓ Correct |

7 Your turn

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Where did you work before? | 2. How long have you lived here? |
| 3. What do you enjoy about the job? | |

English for people who need to **work** in it, not only study it.

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