

QUESTION FORMS

1. Yes/No Questions

Yes/no questions require the inversion of subject and auxiliary verb. If there is no auxiliary verb, a form of the verb "to do" is used as the auxiliary.

He is taking the quiz.

Is he taking the quiz?

He can take the quiz today.

Can he take the quiz today?

He gives quizzes on Friday.

Does he give* quizzes on Friday?

*Note: If the verb is in the simple present, use **does** or **do** in the question. If the verb is simple past, use **did**.

2. Information or Wh- Questions

Information questions require the use of a wh- word (who, what, where, when, why, or how) representing the information requested (e.g., "where" for location) at the beginning of the question. As in yes/no questions, subject and auxiliary are inverted. (If the question word replaces the subject, no inversion is required. See third example.)

He is taking the quiz.

What is he taking?

He can take the quiz today.

When can he take the quiz?

He gives quizzes on Friday.

Who gives quizzes on Friday?

He gives quizzes on Friday.

When does he give quizzes?

Sometimes information questions are formed without inverting the subject and auxiliary and without fronting the wh- word. These questions are often asked either to show surprise or disbelief or, more commonly, to request repetition of information the listener hasn't heard or understood.

He can take the quiz today.

He can take the quiz when?

He can take what today?

3. Alternative or Either/Or Questions

Alternative questions provide the listener with a choice. Although these questions seem like yes/no questions, they cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." A choice must be made and stated.

Is the answer to number two 10^{-3} or 10^3 ?
It's 10^{-3} .

Should I make an appointment or can I just drop by?
You can just drop by.

4. Statement Questions

Sometimes English speakers use statement form (no subject/auxiliary inversion, no wh- words) to ask a question. Generally, the intonation of these statements will follow that of other questions.

This has to be done by Tuesday?

DNA is contained in every cell?

Sometimes, the intonation may not follow the normal question pattern and what is meant as a question may sound like a statement. In these cases, context will have to be your guide. To be safe, it is best to restate the students "question" and answer it.

This has to be done by Tuesday?

Yes, this has to be done by Tuesday.

5. Tag Questions

Tag questions are composed of a statement and a short question tagged onto it. If the statement is affirmative, the "tag" will be negative. If the statement is negative, the "tag" will be affirmative.

The test will be on Friday, won't it?
Yes, that's right. It will be.

The test won't be on Friday, will it?
No, it won't be. It's next Monday.

5. Tag Questions (continued)

Tag questions may be spoken with a rising intonation if the speaker is truly seeking information or with a falling intonation if the speaker is expressing an idea she expects the listener to agree with or confirm.

So that proves the theorem, doesn't it?

The speaker believes the theorem is proved and expects the listener to agree.

The tape recorder isn't broken, is it?

The speaker isn't sure if the tape recorder is broken or not.

6. Negative Questions

A negative question is a yes/no question in which the verb is negative and usually a contraction. Negative questions are used to indicate the speaker's belief or attitude. Compare the following questions:

Does he give lots of A's?

Doesn't he give lots of A's?

In the second question, the student has heard that the instructor gives lots of A's and apparently believes it.

Answering negative questions can be tricky. When the expected answer to a negative question is "yes," the answer may be "yes" or "no."

Aren't you supposed to be in class right now?

The speaker believes the student should be in class. The student can answer yes or no, depending on whether he/she should be in class or whether, perhaps, the class has been cancelled and he/she needn't be class.

Yes, I am, but I'm blowing it off today.
No, class was cancelled.

7. Embedded or Indirect Questions

(See handout on Embedded Questions)