

How to Form 5 Essential Types of Questions in English Grammar

1. Asking Yes/No Questions

Yes/No questions are the most basic type of question. You can use them to ask for a simple **yes** or **no** answer. They usually begin with a verb, including auxiliary verbs (a “helping” verb that comes before the main verb) or modal verbs (such as *can* or *would*).

How to Form a Yes/No Question

Let’s start with the example sentence we used above.

It is windy today.

To change this sentence into a question, **simply move the verb to the beginning**. If the sentence has an auxiliary or modal verb, that’s the one you’ll need to move.

Is it windy today?

Let’s look at a few more inversions to form yes/no questions:

She is sad. → **Is she** sad?

The boat is sinking. → **Is the boat** sinking?

He can bake. → **Can he** bake?

If the sentence has no auxiliary verb and the main verb isn’t “to be,” things are a little different. You’ll need to put “do” or “does” at the beginning of the question. Be sure to use the correct tense and form, for example, “did” if the sentence is in the past tense.

Nina plays the violin. → **Does Nina play** the violin? (Notice the new form of “to play” to accommodate the new structure.)

Nina played the violin. → **Did Nina play** the violin?

Nina and Thomas play the violin. **Do Nina and Thomas play** the violin?

Once you’ve had more practice turning basic sentences into questions, you can skip the first step of starting with a sentence and go directly to forming the question.

2. Asking “Five W” Questions/ WH-Questions

The “five Ws” are the question words *who*, *what*, *when*, *where* and *why*. However, just to make things trickier, there are actually other question words in this category too, like “how” and phrases that start with “how.” So you may also hear these referred to as “five W and H” questions or simply “wh-” questions.

Here’s a list of common question words in this category and what each is used for:

What? Which? (to ask about things)

Where? (to ask about locations)

Who? (to ask about people)

When? (to ask about time)

Why? (to ask for the reason)

How? (to ask about the way things happen or are done)

How many? How much? How often? (to ask about the number or amount)

How to Form a Five W Question

Again, let’s start with a basic sentence. For these questions, we’ll need to **replace part of the sentence with a wh- word**. We’ll usually need to **invert the word order** as well, but not always.

Here’s our basic sentence:

Nathan is playing basketball in the park.

When you’re asking about the subject (in this case, “Nathan”) forming a sentence is pretty easy. You just replace the subject with a wh- word. Since “Nathan” is a person, our wh- word is *who*.

Who is playing basketball in the park?

If you’re not asking about the subject, there’ll be some word order inversion.

Note: To be grammatically correct, the pronoun WHO should take the form WHOM if it is the direct or indirect object of the sentence. This, however, is usually reserved for formal writing, and the word WHOM in everyday speech is falling out of usage.

Often, it will sound much more natural to use WHO, no matter what case it takes (the case is the grammatical role a noun plays in relation to other nouns, e.g. subject, direct object, indirect object, etc.).

Let's say we wanted to ask about the object in this sentence. We'll replace it with our wh- word. The object is "basketball," a thing, so our wh- word is *what*.

Nathan is playing **what** in the park?

Now we need to restructure the sentence like this:

What is Nathan playing in the park?

Notice how the subject also has to get moved in between the auxiliary verb and main verb for this type of sentence.

Warning: When *what, who, which* or *whose* is the subject or part of the subject, we do not use the auxiliary. We use the word order subject + verb:

What fell off the wall? *Which* horse won?

Who bought this? *Whose* phone rang?

We can also use *where* to ask about the location. We replace "in the park" with *where*, then move *where* to the beginning of the sentence:

Where is Nathan playing basketball?

3. Using Indirect Questions for Polite English

A direct question is used to ask for information such as, "Which train goes to Bangkok?" or "How much does this box of oranges cost?" These are the types of questions we just covered above.

However, sometimes a direct question **may sound too blunt or unfriendly**, especially if you're asking someone for help or when you don't know the person well.

But don't worry, there's a way you can sound more polite and friendly. Use an indirect question instead. It's simple: just attach a phrase like "Could you please tell me..." or "Do you know..." before the direct question.

How to Form an Indirect Question

Direct question: Where is the bookstore?

Here's how you can change this into an indirect question:

Could you please tell me where the bookstore **is**?

Do you know where the bookstore **is**?

Note the inversion when forming an indirect question. In the direct question, the verb “is” comes **before** the subject “bookstore.” But in the indirect question, the verb is **moved to the end**.

4. Asking Tag Questions (disjunctive or tail questions)

A tag question is simply a sentence with a question tag at the end. It’s **used to check or confirm that you’ve understood** something correctly. For example:

The train leaves at 9 a.m., **doesn’t it**?

You could also use it to confirm whether something you already know or think you know is true.

You will bring the cake, **won’t you**?

How to Form a Tag Question

To form a tag question, you simply add the question tag using the opposite form of the verb/auxiliary or modal verb used in the sentence. So if the verb in the sentence is positive (e.g. “is”), you need the negative version (e.g. “is not”). The basic formula is below.

[Sentence] + , + [opposite form of the same verb used in sentence] + [subject pronoun]?

It **is** raining now. → It **is** raining now, **isn’t** it?

Your father **isn’t** working today. → Your father **isn’t** working today, **is** he?

The students **are** visiting the museum. → The students **are** visiting the museum, **aren’t** they?

Notice that we used the contractions “isn’t” instead of “is not” and “aren’t” instead of “are not.” **Contractions are usually used in negative tags.** Notice also how the subject pronoun is used instead of the subject itself in the tag. In the examples above, “father” becomes “he” and “the students” become “they.”

When there’s no auxiliary verb, use the “do” verb form in the question tag.

Adam walks to class on Tuesdays. → Adam walks to class on Tuesdays, **doesn’t** he?

5. Asking Negative Questions for Confirmation

A negative question is a question that contains the word **not** or a negative verb contraction like **didn’t** (did not), **weren’t** (were not), etc.

Similar to question tags, you can use a negative question to confirm something you believe to be true.

In the example below, you're pretty sure everyone has heard the news but you just want to confirm. So you ask:

Didn't you hear the news? Sally won the marathon.

A negative question can also show your surprise that something you expect to happen hasn't happened yet. In the example below, you expected him to call back soon and you're surprised he hasn't. So you ask:

Hasn't he called back yet? It's been two hours.

How to Form a Negative Question

Verb contractions are usually used in negative questions. The basic formula is below.

[Negative verb contraction] + [subject] + [main verb] + [other information]?

Wouldn't you like another cup of coffee?

In more formal settings, you might use "not" instead of a contraction.

[Auxiliary verb] + [subject] + **not** + [main verb] + [other information]?

Has she **not** handed in her assignment?

Some Other Types of Questions

Choice Questions

We use choice questions when we offer choices.

Choice questions	Answers
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Would you like a house or a flat?	A house, of course.
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Do you go with your family or alone?	With my family.
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Are you a little nervous or excited?	A little nervous.
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Hypothetical Questions

We ask hypothetical questions to have a general idea of a certain situation (like a questionnaire). Rules of conditional sentences are applied to form such questions.

Examples

What would you do if you won the lottery?
Would you leave your country and your relatives behind to study abroad?
If you had a superpower, what would it be?

Embedded questions (indirect questions)

We use them in reported speech or in polite questions. Rules of direct to indirect speech transformation are applied to form such questions.

Examples:

She asked me if she could borrow my dictionary.
She asked me where the nearest train station was.(not where was the nearest train station...)

Note: notice that the word order is affirmative.
Could you tell me how I can go to The Central Park?

Leading questions

We ask leading questions when we want to get the answer we desire.

Examples:

What do you think of the terrible side effects of drugs?
Were you with your family at the time of the crime?

Exercises

Rewrite the following sentences as yes/no question, WH-question (using the underlined word or phrase), tag question, indirect question and negative question.

Example (This one has been done for you.)

Shawon will make dinner tonight .

Yes/No Question: Will Shawon make dinner tonight?

Wh-Question: Who will make dinner tonight? , When will Shawon make dinner ?

Tag Question: Shawon will make dinner tonight, won't he?

Indirect Question: Do you know who will make dinner tonight?

Negative Question: Won't Shawon make dinner tonight?

Now try the following exercises.

1. Amin will be a famous agriculturalist .

Yes/No :

WH1 :

WH2 :

Tag :

Indirect:

Negative:

2. They are working collaboratively on a project.

Yes/No :

WH1 :

WH2 :

Tag :

Indirect:

Negative:

3. Rana was drawing a picture on the board.

Yes/No :

WH1 :

WH2 :

Tag :

Indirect:

Negative: