1 Negative questions

Negative questions are formed by adding n't to a form of be or to the auxiliary, or using a negative adverb:

Wasn't Kate at the meeting last week?

Haven't you seen Owen Wilson's new film yet?

Why hasn't Stella contacted her solicitor yet?

Why will you never give me a straight answer?

**FORMALITY CHECK** To be more formal, we can use not. We put this after the subject:

Why has Ms Gibbons not contacted the duty solicitor yet?

We often use negative questions to check or confirm that something we believe or expect is correct; we expect a positive (yes) answer:

'Id like to volunteer for a wildlife charity.' 'Aren't you a member of a wildlife organisation?'

(I believe that you are.)

We also use negative questions if we suspect that something we believed is not correct; in this case we expect a negative (no) answer:

I didn't expect to see you here this evening. Didn't your visitors come after all?

(I don't think they came.)

We can answer negative questions with yes or no:

'Hasn't the weather been dreadful recently?' 'Yes, (it has/it has been dreadful).'

'Wasn't the hairdresser busy?' 'No, (she wasn't/she wasn't busy).'

We can also give the opposite response to what the speaker expects, but we would then soften the response with an explanation:

'Hasn't the weather been dreadful recently?' 'Well, no, I think it's been OK.'

'Wasn't the hairdresser busy?' 'Yes, she was actually, but she's very fast!'

We use negative questions

• to try to persuade someone to do something:

  Won't you come with us to the beach tomorrow? It'll be fun.

• to give an opinion which expects agreement:

  Don't you think that the new shopping centre is really ugly?

• to express surprise that something isn't correct:

  Haven't astronomers discovered a tenth planet? (= I thought that they had.)

• to express criticism or complaint, often with why:

  Didn't you remember to post the letter? Honestly, I can't trust you to do anything!

  Why haven't you finished your homework?

  Why didn't you tell me you'd taken up golf?
Practice

1 Make negative questions with suitable forms of the verbs from the box. Some of the questions start with Why and you may need to add other words. Then match each question to one or two of the functions A–D below, as in the example.

Listen and check.

belong buy do give hear join take tell think

0 "What's Paolo Nutini's new single like?"
   "Haven't you heard it yet? I'm amazed – it's on the radio every five minutes!"
   
1 "Alice has just applied to join the college choir."
   "Have you heard about it? I thought she joined last year."
   
2 "Mr Soames from Brent Trading is coming in on the 6th for a lunchtime meeting."
   "Really? Your holiday in that week?"
   
3 "Oh, you're back. I was just about to do the washing-up."
   "Have you seen...? I've been out for three hours!"
   
4 "Joe and I are going to the food festival on Sunday. Can we join you?"
   "I'm busy on Sunday, I'm afraid, but thanks for asking."
   
5 "Sorry, but I can't come to your dinner party tomorrow. I'm double-booked."
   "What about...? You didn't say when it was."
   
6 "We need to get some flowers or something to take with us to the hospital."
   "Oh, you're going? You were going to do it in your lunch break."
   
7 "Those new hair extensions look awful on older women."
   "No, actually, I don't. In fact, I'm thinking of having some put in."
   
8 "Harriet Ellis may arrive late for the conference on Thursday."
   "Are you...? The opening talk? That's a problem."
   
A asking for confirmation of an opinion  C expressing criticism
B expressing surprise  D inviting / trying to persuade someone

2 GRAMMAR IN USE Complete the article, using suitable words from the box in a negative form.

Strange but true

THIS RATHER (1) story from yesterday's news may have escaped your attention.

Customs officials last night (2) an attempt at (3) entry into Britain by an (4) group of immigrants: fleas. The fleas belong to the Cardoso Flea Circus of Australia, who are due to perform this evening at the Edinburgh Festival. The troupe (or the human part of it at least) feels that this is a highly (5) way to treat artists. They feel that it is (6) for them to cancel the show at this late stage, so despite the (7) of having lost their star performers, the show must go on. The flea trainer, Wyman Leung, is currently working with an alternative cast of fleas provided by Cambridge and Bristol Universities, although it is a huge (8) to have to work with ordinary cat fleas, rather than the elite strain of crossed cat and kangaroo fleas that were sent back to Australia. The circus didn't even bother trying to train the somewhat (9) pulex irritans – the human flea.

Home Office spokespeople were all (10) for comment.
Questions and question words

1 Question types

Most questions are closed (yes/no questions) or open (with a question word). There is a third type of question: an alternative question asks the listener to make a choice between two or more options:

‘Would you prefer to see the doctor on Thursday or Friday?’ ‘Friday, please.’
‘I’m sorry. Did you ask for French fries, steamed potatoes or rice?’ ‘Rice, please.’

Pronunciation ➤ 1.15

In conversation, we can use statement word order with closed questions, but not with open questions, to check something we think we know or to express surprise. We usually give them a rising intonation:

You’ve sent the tickets (✔)? You haven’t sent the tickets (✘)? Why not (✔)?
X Why you haven’t sent the tickets? ✔ Why haven’t you sent the tickets?

When we ask questions about opinions and feelings, we often omit that:
Do you think (that) the nursery will give me a refund for when Elly was ill?

2 Subject questions

Who, what, which and whose can be the subject of a verb, as well as the object:

Who invited Jack? (Meryl did.) Who did Meryl invite? (She invited Jack.)

If the question word is the subject, the word order is the same as in a statement:
Who made these two vases?
What happened at the end of the film?
Whose mobile phone is ringing?

Be careful not to confuse subject and object questions:
X What said she? ✔ What did she say?

We use question word order with a subject question word when we are keen to return to a topic earlier in the conversation and want to get an answer:
Well, what did happen at the end of the film?
When we use who, what and which as subjects, we use a singular verb in the question, even if they refer to a plural subject:
‘Who lives in that amazing chateau?’ ‘The old Count and Countess live there.’

3 how (+ adjective/adverb)

How asks about manner (the way something is done), progress, health or opinion:
How are things going with the building? (= How is it progressing?)

Note the difference between How’s X? and What’s X like?:
How’s Christine? (asks about Christine’s health)
What’s Christine like? (asks about Christine’s appearance/personality)
We do not use *like* with *how*:

\[ \times \] *How’s Neil like?*  \[ \checkmark \] *What’s Neil like?*

\[ \times \] *How’s the weather like at the moment?*  \[ \checkmark \] *How’s the weather at the moment?*

When we form questions with *how* + adjective/adverb, we don’t usually repeat the adjective/adverb in the answer: *How far is it from the station?*

\[ \times \] *It’s 500 metres far from the station.*  \[ \checkmark \] *It’s 500 metres from the station.*

But with adjectives describing how big/large/wide/high/tall/deep/long, etc. we do repeat it:

*The new bed is 1.8 metres wide.*  *The pool is only 1.5 metres deep.*  *The track is 10 km long.*

### 4 what and which

We use *what* to ask about one (or more) of many things:

*What languages* is it best to learn if you want to be an interpreter?

We usually use *which* when the answer is one of a limited number of alternatives:

*Which cake do you want to try first?* (limited choice of cakes)

Compare with *what*:

*What cakes do you like best?* (of all cakes; unlimited choice)

We can use *what* and *which* without a noun if it is clear what we are talking about:

*‘What’s for dinner this evening?’*  *‘Well, we’ve got a chicken or burgers. Which do you fancy?’*

There are several common expressions in questions with *what*:

*What else did the police officer say? Are they going to prosecute?* *(What = what other things)*

*What’s the point in arguing with Maisie? She’s always right.*

(= This course of action is pointless.)

*What’s the use of saving money when interest rates are so low?*  *(= This course of action is pointless.)*

*The conference dinner is at the Central Hotel. What about staying overnight?* (suggestion)

### 5 *wh-* words + prepositions

We usually put the preposition at the end of a *wh-* question:

*Who are you buying the bracelet for?*  *Which station will you be arriving at?*

**FORMALITY CHECK** In more formal speech and writing, we put the preposition before the question word, and change *who* to *whom* (» Unit 9.3):

*To which letter are you referring?*  *From whom did the defendant accept the payment?*

### 6 Rhetorical questions

A rhetorical question has the form of a question but it does not require an answer.

We use these

- to make an assertion about someone/something: *Haven’t you grown?*
- to draw attention to something, usually negative:
  *What is your bag doing in the hall? Put it away.*
- to introduce a new topic: *Do you remember my friend Elena from Paraguay? Well, it turns out that she’s going back there in a few weeks.*

**ACADEMIC ENGLISH** In formal writing and speeches, rhetorical questions are often used to draw the audience’s attention to something, and the writer/speaker usually answers the question:

*What does the public want from their government? They want openness and fairness, obviously, but also the ability to manage the economy ...*

Question tags, reply and indirect questions » Unit 79
Practice

1 Complete B's questions with suitable verbs and/or question words, and any other words necessary. The questions should ask about the underlined parts of A's statements.

0 A Come on! I've been waiting out in the cold for ages!
   B Oh, really? How long... exactly have you been waiting...?

1 A Someone told me that you've decided to give up the course.
   B Oh, .............................................................. that?

2 A I've just been offered two jobs!
   B That's great! ........................................................... to take?

3 A We could just paint the walls or we could put wallpaper up - what do you think?
   B ................................................................. that thick soundproofing paper up?
   Then we won't hear next door's music!

4 A The roads round here are in a terrible state. I'm going to complain to someone.
   B Good idea, but ..............................................................?

5 A We went to a comedy night yesterday, and saw some really good comedians.
   B Oh, ................................................................. see?

6 A Jenna's decided to stop eating breakfast because she's putting on weight.
   B Really! What's .............................................................. giving up breakfast when she spends all her evenings in front of the TV with crisps and chocolates?

2 Grammar in Use  Find seven more mistakes in the conversation and correct them.

SEAN I've just joined the local wildlife trust.
GILL Is that some kind of club or is it a society?
SEAN Well, neither, really. It's a charity. The idea is that it protects local wildlife.
GILL What's the point to join that?
SEAN What's the point? Honestly! What a crazy question!
GILL Why you think it's crazy?
SEAN Well, we're in danger of losing a lot of our wildlife as the area becomes more built-up. So we need to create safe spaces for local species.
GILL Oh, I see. And who create the spaces?
SEAN The people who run the charity.
GILL How much does it cost to join?
SEAN Oh, it only costs a few pounds much.
GILL To who do you pay that, then?
SEAN To the charity, of course.
GILL Can you visit the safe spaces they create?
SEAN Yes, we went to their main one last weekend.
GILL How was it like?
SEAN Interesting, very peaceful, just a nice, large wooded area.
   In fact, they held an introductory barbecue for new members.
GILL Who did organise that?
SEAN The people who run the charity. It was great, a lot of people came.
3 Complete the questions with one word only in each gap.

1 ............ car did you decide to buy, the Toyota or the Volkswagen?
2 Who ............ after your cats when you go on holiday?
3 We appreciate your extensive experience, Ms Wise, but what ............ can you bring to our company?
4 ............ action can the police take about this? ‘Well, we can give the offender a formal warning, and apprehend him or her if the warning is ignored.’
5 I haven’t seen Isobel for ages. ............ was she when you saw her yesterday?
6 One final question before commencing discussion of the contract – with ............ in your company will the negotiations be taking place?
7 Everyone in the office seems really quiet today. ............’s happened?
8 ............ phone is ringing? Could you please turn phones off during the lesson?
9 You look thoughtful. What are you thinking ............?
10 You didn’t finish telling me about your missing jewellery. Who ............ take it? Did the police ever find out?

4 Write the question for each reply, as in the example. Use the prompts in brackets and add a question word where necessary.

0 (own / white Cadillac / drive / around here)
   ‘Who owns the white Cadillac that drives around here?’
   ‘Oh, I think the Americans from Harding Road own it.’
1 (applicant / think / be / suitable?) ‘.................................’,
   ‘Well, I think they’re both reasonable, but Stephen Wrigley seems to be the best for this post.’
2 (give / cattle / that type of feed?) ‘.................................’,
   ‘We’d only been giving them that particular type of feed for about two months.’
3 (tell / you / the divorce?) ‘.................................’,
   ‘I think it was Susan who told me about it, but most people at college seem to know.’
4 (else / do / holiday?) ‘.................................’,
   ‘We didn’t really do much else on the holiday – it was a really small resort.’
5 (persuade / David / stay / team?) ‘.................................’,
   ‘No, I don’t think we could have persuaded him to stay. The counter-offer was far too attractive.’
6 (be / point / complain / faulty goods?) ‘.................................’,
   ‘There’s every point in complaining! How else will shops know that their goods are faulty?’
7 (watch / be / better / scuba-diving?) ‘.................................’,
   ‘Both of the watches are suitable for scuba-diving, but I think you’ll find that the Timepiece is more reliable at greater depths.’
8 (the accused / steal / getaway car?) ‘.................................’,
   ‘Your honour, we believe that he stole the getaway car on behalf of Seamus Presley, the leader of the Presley gang.’

Go online for more practice and a progress test 217
Spoken questions and responses

1 Indirect questions
We usually use indirect questions to make a question more polite or more tentative. We often use them when we are in a formal situation, when we are talking to strangers, or when we are not sure whether the person we are asking knows the answer.

In indirect questions we use statement word order; the subject always precedes the verb or verb phrase. This is similar to reported questions (Unit 52):

× Do you know where is the nearest bank? ✓ Do you know where the nearest bank is?
× Could you tell me when did he leave? ✓ Could you tell me when he left?

In indirect questions we can use whether (or not) instead of if (or not) (Unit 52.1):
I wonder whether or not Mum's back? I wonder whether Mum's back or not?

2 Question tags
There are a number of variations in the form of the verb in question tags:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TAGS AFTER ...</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am</td>
<td>I'm still part of the team, aren't I?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>need (negative)</td>
<td>He doesn't need to repeat the year, does he? (or: He needn't repeat the year, need he?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>may/might</td>
<td>It may/might be fine tomorrow, mightn't it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must/can't + have</td>
<td>He must have taken it, mustn't he? They can't have seen it, can they?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ought to</td>
<td>We really ought to leave now, oughtn't we?/shouldn't we?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let's</td>
<td>Let's try that new restaurant, shall we?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a positive sentence contains a negative or 'restrictive' adverb, e.g. scarcely, hardly (Unit 48), it takes a positive tag:

There was hardly enough food for everyone at the wedding, was there?

Differences between British and American English → page 368

Generally, the pronoun in the tag matches the subject of the sentence:

This is a good example, isn't it? (This and it are both singular.)

Those are the flowers for Mum, aren't they? (Those and they are both plural.)

Nothing ever happens when I'm away, does it?

But notice these exceptions:

Someone's been taking my food again, haven't they?

Nobody has phoned, have they?

We can use question tags for several purposes, and we say them differently.

• to ask for information (we don't know the answer), we use a rising intonation (✓):
  You haven't talked to Jim yet, have you?

• to confirm something we think we already know, we use a falling intonation (✓):
  It's the first of May today, isn't it?

• to make a request, we use a falling intonation (✓):
  You'll bring me back some of those lovely oranges, won't you?

We also use question tags with imperatives. The form of the tag depends on the purpose:

Pick me up at eight, could you? (request)

Stay another night with us, won't you? (invitation)

Turn the TV off, will you? Don't annoy Rufus, will you? (polite command)

We can also use a positive statement with a positive tag when we seek confirmation:

'I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to cancel this evening. I'm really busy and I'm still at work.'

'Poor you. Things are still really hectic, are they?' (to express sympathy)

Pronunciation → 1.22
3 Reply and echo questions

We use ‘follow on’ or reply questions to show interest and to make a conversation ‘flow’:

‘We went to a really interesting play last night.’ ‘Did you?’

We form reply questions in the same way as tag questions, using auxiliary verbs, do did, etc.

But, unlike tag questions, if the statement is positive, the reply question is positive and if
the statement is negative, the reply question is negative:

‘I’m going to Malaysia on business next week.’ ‘Are you (really)?’

‘They didn’t give the concert after all last night.’ ‘Didn’t they?’

Reply questions can often express surprise, especially with the word really or an
exclamation:

‘Great news: Jim’s just been promoted.’ ‘Has he really? / Has he? How fantastic!’

We use negative reply questions to show emphatic agreement with the speaker. Here we
use a falling intonation:

‘That was the best holiday we’ve ever had!’ ‘Yes, wasn’t it?’

When we want to clarify something that the speaker has said or asked, we can use an
echo question:

‘I went to Stacy’s yesterday.’ ‘You went where?’

‘Have you been to the Earth Centre?’ ‘Have I been to what? / Have I been where?’

4 Short responses

If we want to agree with the speaker or say something is the same, we use these patterns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive statement</th>
<th>Negative statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>so + be/auxiliary</td>
<td>‘I saw Jane yesterday.’ ‘Oh, yes, so did I.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subject + be/auxiliary or modal verb + too</td>
<td>‘I saw Jane yesterday.’ ‘I did too.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither/or + be/auxiliary</td>
<td>‘I didn’t have enough money’. ‘Neither/or did I.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subject + be/auxiliary or modal verb + either</td>
<td>‘I didn’t have enough money’. ‘I didn’t either.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To disagree or say something is different we can use a form of be, an auxiliary or
modal verb:

‘I love French movies.’ ‘Oh, I don’t.’ ‘I haven’t seen that one.’ ‘Oh, I have.’

In informal speech we can just use the object pronoun, usually with too, neither or nor:

‘I saw Jane yesterday.’ ‘Me too!’

‘Julian’s coming with us.’ ‘Him too?’

‘I didn’t want to go.’ ‘Me neither.’ / ‘Nor me.’

We can use so at the beginning of a short answer to express a certain amount of surprise.
With this meaning we use so + subject + be/auxiliary verb, etc:

‘They’ve put a new statue in front of the palace.’ → ‘So have they!’

To express a negative response to a question or prediction we make the verb negative and
use so in informal spoken English:

‘Are you coming to the party tomorrow?’ → ‘I think not.’

‘It’s going to rain!’ → ‘Oh, I don’t hope so!’

An exception to this is hope. We do not use the not ... so pattern but use hope not:

‘It’s going to rain!’ ‘No way is it going to rain!’

‘It’s $25.’ ‘No way am I paying $25 for that!’
Practice

1 Complete the indirect questions, as in the example. 

0 Who is responsible for street cleaning in this area?
   Could you tell me who is responsible for street cleaning in this area?

1 Why did it take you so long to deliver this parcel?
   I’d like to know

2 Has Harriet finished the minutes of the meeting yet or not?
   Can you tell me whether

3 When will the new curtains for the hotel suites be ready?
   Please let me know

4 How often is the bed linen in the villas changed?
   Does the brochure say

5 Which metro station should we go to for the Eiffel Tower?
   Do you know

6 Did Vettel win yesterday’s race or not?
   I wonder whether

2 Complete each question with an appropriate question tag. 

1 ‘I hope you’re not doing anything tonight. I’ve just booked tickets for the circus.’
   ‘Oh, there were tickets left, ..................? I thought it would have sold out.’

2 We needn’t register before the first talk, ...............?

3 Be a good girl and pop to the shops for me, ...............? We need some cheese.

4 How can you think of marrying her? You’ve hardly known her five minutes, ..........?

5 No one was staffing the west turnstile at the time of the accident, ...............?

6 Put some decent trousers on, ...............? They won’t let you in wearing jeans.

7 It seems to me, Minister, that the government has broken all its pre-election promises regarding the health service, ...............?

8 ‘I’ll help you with your homework.’ ‘Oh, you can do calculus, ............... , Dad?’

9 Mrs Allison did say that we could take dictionaries into the exam with us, ...............?

10 ‘Ryan didn’t go to work yesterday because he was ill.’ ‘Oh, he was ill, ...............?
   I thought he was watching the football.’

3 Match each sentence 1–10 with a response A–J.

1 I can’t stand cold weather.
   A Yes, wasn’t it?

2 I heard that they’re going to put up the train fares.
   B Have you?

3 I’d love another coffee.
   C Neither can I.

4 Dorian didn’t come to the party.
   D So they have!

5 We’ve just bought a new high definition TV.
   E Me too.

6 Are you going to see Carol later?
   F Really? So did we.

7 Would you like to come bungee jumping with us?
   G Didn’t he?

8 That was a lovely concert.
   H I hope not.

9 We took the kids to the zoo last weekend.
   I No way am I doing that!

10 Wow. They’ve just scored another goal!
   J I don’t think so.
Complete the questions and the short responses in the conversation below. Write one word or a contraction in each gap. *Listen and check.*

**MS MARCH** Excuse me. Do you know (1) .............. this is the flat advertised for rent in the local shop?

**LANDLADY** Yes, it is. I’m the landlady.

**MS MARCH** I’m Eleanor March. I think we spoke on the phone a few days ago.

**LANDLADY** (2) .............. we? I don’t remember. Well, come in, (3) .............. you? This is the living room. It’s not looking at its best right now, I’m afraid.

**MS MARCH** (4) .............. it? It looks fine to me.

**LANDLADY** It’s a bit untidy. That’s one of the reasons I’ll be pleased to see the back of the current tenants. Now, come through. This is the master bedroom.

**MS MARCH** Mmm, it’s nice. But there’s no radiator in here ...

**LANDLADY** Er, no, but it’s got an electric heater.

**MS MARCH** It’s got a (5) .............. ?

**LANDLADY** An electric heater.

**MS MARCH** Oh, I see. But aren’t electric heaters quite expensive?

**LANDLADY** Oh, I don’t think (6) .............. – they’re very economical. Now, through here is the second bedroom ...

**MS MARCH** Oh, there are two bedrooms, (7) .............. there?

**LANDLADY** Yes. And it’s very large for a second bedroom in a flat of this type.

**MS MARCH** Yes, (8) .............. it is! It’s an excellent size. Oh dear, someone’s broken the window in here, (9) .............. they?

**LANDLADY** Oh, don’t worry about that. I’ll get that fixed. This is the bathroom.

**MS MARCH** Mmm. It’s a bit dingy. I don’t suppose you could paint it, (10) .............. you?

**LANDLADY** Well, we can discuss that later. This is the kitchen. I designed it myself.

**MS MARCH** Did you (11) .............. ? It’s great!

**LANDLADY** Yes, though it is in a bit of a mess. Now, let’s go back to the living room, (12) .............. we?

**MS MARCH** Yes. Well I’m quite interested in renting the flat. Nobody else has been to see it, have (13) .............. ?

**LANDLADY** No. Would you like to see any of the rooms again?

**MS MARCH** I don’t (14) .............. so. But I’d just like to check the rent. I think the advert said it was £650 a month, (15) .............. it?

**LANDLADY** (16) .............. it? I thought I’d put £750.

**MS MARCH** Well, £650 plus bills.

**LANDLADY** Oh yes, so (17) .............. did – £650 plus bills.

**MS MARCH** Are there any particular rules?

**LANDLADY** Well, I don’t like loud music.

**MS MARCH** Oh, (18) .............. do I. I always play my music very quietly.

**LANDLADY** Good. Anything else?

**MS MARCH** What about pets? (19) .............. you tell me whether you allow cats?

**LANDLADY** You see I’ve got a small cat – I love cats!

**MS MARCH** Me (20) .............. ! I’ve got three cats! I think we’re going to get on really well!