

2 Reply questions

Reply questions are like question tags in form, but we use them to show we are listening and to continue the conversation:

'The doctor says the headaches are caused by stress.' **'Does she?'** I wonder if you're spending too much time on the computer.'

'My computer's been causing problems all week.' **'Has it?'** What's wrong?'

Reply questions are positive if the statement is positive, and negative if the statement is negative: 'My doctor **doesn't** like giving antibiotics.' **'Doesn't he?'**

We usually use a rising tone (↗), and we stress the auxiliary verb: *Does she? Has it?*

Pronunciation ▶ 1.36

3 Indirect questions

The form of indirect questions is similar to the form of reported questions (▶ Unit 69.1):

Could you tell me where Studio 5 is?

We can use indirect questions to be polite or if we think the person we are asking may not know the answer to the question. We introduce the question with a polite phrase, for example:

*Excuse me, **can/could you tell me** if this is the correct platform for Edinburgh?*

***Do you know** what time the film finishes?*

***I'd like to know** what you think about my idea.*

The word order after the polite phrase is the same as in reported questions:


direct question

indirect question

if/whether/wh- word (+ subject) + verb:

'**Is this** the road for Cardiff?' 'Can you tell me **if this is** the road for Cardiff, please?'

'**Who is** the manager here?' 'Do you know **who the manager is** here?'

 We ALWAYS use statement word order in indirect questions, and we do NOT use *do/does* or *did*:

✓ Can you tell me **what the correct time is?** ✗ ~~Can you tell me what is the correct time?~~

✓ I'd like to know **where you heard that.** ✗ ~~I'd like to know where did you hear that.~~

We can also use the infinitive in indirect questions:

'How do you turn this machine on?' → 'Do you know **how to turn** this machine on?'

'Where do we buy tickets for the play?' → 'Can you tell us **where to buy** tickets for the play?'

'What should I buy?' → 'I'd like to know **what to buy.**'

In spoken English, we often say *Could you ...?* and *Do you ...?* very fast and the words run together: *could you /kədju:/ do you /dju:/.*

Pronunciation ▶ 1.37

4 Indirect question forms in statements

If we don't know the answer to a question, we can use a polite phrase such as *I'm not sure* or *I don't know* + an indirect question form:

'What time does the film start?' 'I'm afraid **I'm not sure** what time it starts. I'll just check.'

'Is it raining in London?' → 'I **can't tell you** if it's raining here – I'm in the studio!'

'How do I get to Studio 5?' 'I'm sorry. **I don't know** how to get there.'

We can also make a statement with an indirect question if we are 'thinking aloud' or asking ourselves something:

'Where did I put my glasses?' → 'I **wonder** where I put my glasses.'

'Are you spending too much time on the computer?' → 'I **wonder** if you are spending too much time on the computer.'

'Did I turn the iron off?' → 'I **can't remember** if I turned the iron off.'

'What time are the builders coming?' → 'I **don't know** what time the builders are coming.'