

49 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** (↗)?*

*✗ **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:

subject **object** **object** **subject**
***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:

*✗ **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)