

## Lesson 13

## Questions, Tag Questions & Contractions

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### QUESTIONS

Read the following conversations. You will notice that while communicating with others we often ask and answer questions.

: Have you met our new neighbour?  
: Yes, I have.  
: Do you know what he does?  
: No, I don't. We just said 'hello' to each other.

: Are you an artist?  
: No, I'm not.  
: What do you do?  
: I'm a teacher of English.  
: Where do you teach?  
: At the Govt. Boys' High School here.  
: Do you like teaching?  
: Oh, yes. I find it very rewarding.

: Have you seen the film 'Titanic'?  
: Yes, I have.  
: When did you see it?  
: Just a week ago.  
: How did you like it?  
: Oh, it was wonderful!

Notice the questions in the conversations can be divided into two types: **yes/no questions** and **wh-questions**.

**Yes/no questions** are those which can be answered by 'yes' or 'no'. However, to answer these types of questions with just 'yes' or 'no' is often too abrupt, and also, not very polite. So, we often make the answers more polite by adding a subject and repeating the auxiliary verb, or the 'be' verb in the questions with 'yes' or 'no'.

For example,

*Yes, I do. No, I don't. Yes, I am. No, you aren't, etc.*

**Yes/no questions** usually have a **rising intonation**, i.e. in asking the question the voice of the speaker usually rises at the end of the sentence.

On the other hand, **wh-questions** begin with

**wh-**, such as, **what, where, when, who, whom, why** and **which**, and cannot be answered with 'yes' or 'no'. 'How', although it doesn't start with wh-, is included in this type of question. For example,

What do you do?  
I'm a businessman  
Where do you live?  
I live in Mirpur. (or, 'In Mirpur'.)  
Who do you live with?  
With my parents.  
How old are they?  
They are in their sixties.

**Wh-questions** generally have a **falling intonation**, i.e. the voice of the speaker falls at the end of the question.

### Contractions

While practicing *tag questions* you may have noticed that another typical feature of conversations is the use of **contractions**. We often hear people say,

*Who's there? It's great! That's not true. I'll see you tomorrow. etc.*

A contraction is made out of two words. An apostrophe (') shows where a letter or letters have been left out. Thus,

**I am = I'm Who is = Who's I will = I'll etc.**

Many of our everyday expressions contain contractions formed from *verbs or modals plus the word 'not'*. For example, *I can't believe it! You don't mean it! It won't happen again. Isn't it lovely!* etc.

Notice that the contractions of **can + not** is **can't**, and of **will + not** is **won't**. Also note that you cannot have contraction of the verb **am + not (x)**.

For example, the use of contraction in the sentence

*I amn't sure! is wrong.* But you can use contraction in this sentence in the following way,

*I'm not sure!*

### Tag Questions

However, there is a different kind of question that is very common in English. This is known as the **tag question**. A **tag question** is in fact a question in the form of a **statement + a question tag**.

**Tag questions** are often used in conversational English.

Read the following mini-dialogues:

- a. : The colour is nice, isn't it?  
: Oh, yes. It's brilliant!
- b. : It isn't raining, is it?  
: No, I don't think so.
- c. : Kakon has got a younger sister, hasn't she?  
: Yes, she has. Rina, I think, is two years younger than her.
- d. : We aren't too late, are we?  
: Not at all. People have just started coming in.
- e. : Shujan had an exhibition last month, didn't he?  
: That's right. It was a grand success!

### Activity-2



A police officer is talking to one of the two young men they have arrested from a college campus. **Make his statements into questions by adding tag questions.**

- You were arrested at eleven o'clock today from the college campus, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You are not a student of the college, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You and your friend were riding a motorcycle, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You knew that motorcycles were not allowed in the campus, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You didn't stop when the campus police tried to stop you, \_\_\_\_\_?
- In fact, you tried to hit him and escape, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You were carrying fire weapons, \_\_\_\_\_?
- Your friend was carrying a bag, \_\_\_\_\_?
- There was a wireless set inside the bag, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You will tell me the truth now, \_\_\_\_\_?

### Activity-3

Now answer the policeman's questions in **Activity-2** using short answers. Use the prompts in brackets.

- |                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| i. Yes, I was. (yes) | vi. _____ (no)   |
| ii. _____ (yes)      | vii. _____ (no)  |
| iii. _____ (yes)     | viii. _____ (no) |
| iv. _____ (no)       | ix. _____ (no)   |
| v. _____ (yes)       | x. _____ (yes)   |

### Activity-4

**Complete the following dialogue by adding question tags.**

Habib: Hi, Nahar. You had a class at three today, \_\_\_\_\_?  
Nahar: That's right.  
Habib: But you didn't go to the class, \_\_\_\_\_?  
Nahar: Why do you ask?  
Habib: Well, you went to see Monpura with Rimi, \_\_\_\_\_?  
Nahar: This is not fair, Habib. You aren't spying on me, \_\_\_\_\_?  
Habib: No, I'm not. As a matter of fact, I went to see the movie, too.  
Nahar: You could come up and say 'hello' to us, \_\_\_\_\_?  
Habib: Yes, that I could.

### Activity-5

**Work in groups. First add a question tag to each statement in A, and then match a response from B with a tag question in A. One is done for you.**

- A. i. You are not resigning from your job, are you?  
c. What else can I do? I have no option.
- ii. You can type, \_\_\_\_\_?  
iii. Aslam worked as an accountant in a company for a while, \_\_\_\_\_?  
iv. He isn't the only dentist in town, \_\_\_\_\_?  
v. You agree with my views on education, \_\_\_\_\_?
- B. a. Yes, I did a course last month.  
b. Well, actually he is.  
c. What else can I do? I have no option.  
d. Yes, just before he got this job in the bank.  
e. Well, to some extent, yes.

### Activity-6

**Question tags are best tested in single sentences. Add question tags to the following sentences first. Then work in pairs. Ask the questions and then answer them promptly.**

- He's a footballer, \_\_\_\_\_?
- He comes from Brazil, \_\_\_\_\_?
- She likes to watch Hindi films, \_\_\_\_\_?
- That was an excellent movie, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You will write to me everyday, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You never told her that, \_\_\_\_\_?
- Manna will never tell me a lie, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You love ice-cream, don't you?
- Saba looks beautiful, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You aren't bored, \_\_\_\_\_?

### Activity-7

**Replace the underlined words in each sentence with a contraction. Can you see the fun in what is being said?**

- : So you are going to be a pilot.  
: Yes, I have high hopes.
- : Please tell me why you are standing on the new sidewalk.  
: We are cementing our friendship!
- : Oh, she is always changing her mind.  
: I hope one day she will find one she wants to keep.
- : Tell us where we will be able to hear a stars sing.  
: You will be able to hear them sing in the opera house.



### Language Focus

We usually use **tag questions** when we want the other to agree with what we are saying.

Tag questions encourage or invite the other person to have the same opinion as the speaker. For example, when I ask my friend, "Do you like chocolate?", I am expecting either a 'yes' or a 'no' answer.

But when I ask someone, "You like chocolate, don't you?", I'm indirectly encouraging the other person to say, "Yes, I do".

With tag questions the proper use of **intonation** is important. By **intonation** we mean, the pitch or the up and down of the voice. There are *two intonations that can be used with tag questions*.

- Voice rises at the end (rising intonation). This means the speaker is asking for information. Even though the speaker expects to hear 'yes', he or she is not really sure.
- Voice drops at the end (falling intonation). The speaker is pretty sure of himself or herself. However, the speaker is politely asking for the other's agreement.

### Activity-1

**Add a tag question to each of the following sentences.**

- You are a student, \_\_\_\_\_?
- He has got a computer, \_\_\_\_\_?
- She doesn't like travelling, \_\_\_\_\_?
- It's possible to fix it, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You will help me, \_\_\_\_\_?
- He speaks good English, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You once lived here, \_\_\_\_\_?
- Nuru is your cousin, \_\_\_\_\_?
- You can swim, \_\_\_\_\_?
- Tag questions aren't very difficult, \_\_\_\_\_?

### Everyday English

There are some common topics and expressions that are often used in carrying out everyday conversations in English. Here is one such. Practise saying the dialogue with a partner. You can make up a new conversation by changing the season.

The following cues might help you: sweating, 38 degree Celsius, very humid, etc.

#### Weather

: Ooof! I'm freezing! The temperature's nearly 5 degree Celsius today, isn't it?  
: Yeah, I think so. It hasn't been so cold in many years, has it?  
: No, not in the last five years. The cold spell will continue

for three to four days more, won't it?  
: I guess so. That's what the weather forecast is.  
: It's getting very windy, too. Let's go inside, shall we?



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