

Simple questions

Simple questions (that is, questions to which one can respond by a simple "yes" or "no") may be formed in three different ways:

1. "Do": one precedes an assertion with "do" or "does" (or "don't" or "doesn't" for a negative expression, or "did", "didn't" for the past):

Do you want to go to the movies?

Does she work at IBM?

Don't you travel quite a bit?

Do they answer questions quickly?

Didn't they want to eat?

But: One never places "do" or "does" before the verb "to be" or before modal verbs in questions; in this case it is preferable to invert the subject and verb:

Are you coming to the reception?

Was the meeting boring?

Weren't you hungry?

2. Inversion: with certain verbs (especially the verbs "to be", "to do", "to have", and modal verbs) questions are formed by inverting the subject and object. (In the case of the verb "to have," which is usually combined with "do" in interrogatives, inversion signals a literary style.)

Is Jack home?

Have you nothing to declare?

Would you like to go to the movies?

Will they ever come to visit?

Can the employees talk to the boss?

Won't you sit down?

3. Modal phrases: If a modal verb is used in a sentence, or if it is strongly implied, a modal phrase can be used to make an interrogative form. The modal phrase is typically an inversion of the subject and verb, in the negative, repeated at the end of the sentence:

It's time to go, isn't it?

He'd like to come with us, wouldn't he?

You would like to go with us, wouldn't you?

You can understand that, can't you?

In the case of a negative question, the modal phrase would be in the affirmative:

You wouldn't want to try it, would you?

She won't be back, will she?

(See also: negations)

Interrogative adverbs

Simple questions solicit a "yes" or "no" answer. More precise questions may be formed by using the interrogative adverbs: when, why, how, how much, where. Generally, the interrogative adverb precedes the rest of the question; then the order of the sentence follows the rules indicated for inversion or for questions formed with "do / does".

Where are you going?

Why do you want to take this class?

How much do you earn a month?

How do these machines work?

When do you expect to get home?

Interrogative pronouns

Interrogative pronouns are used to ask who has done what, to whom, why, with what, etc. Normally these pronouns are placed at the beginning of the sentence; then the order of the sentence follows the rules indicated for inversion or for questions formed with "do / does".

One chooses the pronoun based on its function:

subject (person) : who + question

Who did this painting?

Who wants to get an ice cream?

subject (thing) : what + question

What interests you?

What is good in this restaurant?

direct object (person) : whom + question

Whom did you see in France?

Whom are you going to meet at this reception?

direct object (thing) : what + question

What do you want to do this evening?

What are you preparing?

object of a preposition (person) : preposition + whom + question

About whom are you thinking?

With whom did you go out?

Note: In spoken English, one often places the preposition at the end of the sentence, in which case one uses "who" instead of "whom"

Who are you thinking about?

Who did you go out with?

object of a preposition (thing) : preposition + what + question

With what did you open it?

In what way does that concern you?

Note: In spoken English, the preposition is often put at the end of the sentence:

What did you open it with?

What did they base their opinion on?

Which, which one, which ones.

The adjective "which" and its pronominal forms ("which", "which one", "which ones") ask that a person make a choice. Usually these pronouns will be placed at the beginning of the sentence; then the order of the sentence follows the rules indicated for inversion or for questions formed with "do / does".

Which film do you want to see?

Which date did you choose?

Here are two pizzas. Which one do you prefer?

There are many different Burgundy wines. Which ones do you like?

EXERCISES

1. Make questions to these answers.

1. She works from Monday till Friday.

Where _____ ?

2. He earns much money doing odd jobs.

How much? _____ ?

3. I listen to the radio.

When _____ ?

4. People often do stupid things.

Why _____ ?

5. She has dinner rather late in the evening.

Why _____ ?

6. They watch TV.

How often _____ ?

7. He goes to work.

What time _____ ?

2. Add the correct question word: *what, when, where, who, whose, why, which, how.*

Ex: _____ is it? - ***What is it?***

1. _____ is your name?

2. _____ are you from?

3. _____ are you today?

4. _____ is he?

5. _____ are you tired?

6. _____ pen is this?

7. _____ do you get up?

8. _____ fruit do you like, oranges or lemons?

9. _____ does David have?

10. _____ old is she?

3. Complete the questions and answers.

Ex: *Whose* pen is this? - *It's* my pen.

1. _____ time is it?

_____ 7.30.

2. _____ do you live?

I _____ in New York.

3. _____ car is this?

_____ my car.

4. _____ is John?

_____ at home.

5. _____ are you?

_____ fine, thanks.