

ENGLISH HELPSHEET ASKING QUESTIONS

The basic rule for asking questions in English is straightforward:
Invert the order of the subject and the first auxiliary verb.

- It is snowing. = **Is** it snowing?
- He can speak German. = **Can** he speak German?
- They have lived here a long time. = **Have** they lived here a long time?
- She will arrive at ten o'clock. = **Will** she arrive at ten o'clock?
- He was driving fast. = **Was** he driving fast?
- You have been smoking. = **Have** you been smoking?

If there is no auxiliary, use the verb 'to do'. (→ 'do' = conjugated ; main verb ≠ conjugated)

- You speak fluent French. = **Do** you speak fluent French?
- She lives in Brussels. = **Does** she live in Brussels? (NOT *Does she lives*)
- They lived in Manchester. = **Did** they live in Manchester? (NOT *Did they lived*)
- He had an accident. = **Did** he have an accident? (NOT *Did he had*)

Most questions with question words are made in the same way:

- *How often* **does** she use it?
- *Why* **don't** you come?
- *Where* **do** you work?
- *How many* **did** you buy?
- *What time* **have** you left?
- *Which one* **do** you like?
- *Whose car* **were** you driving?

Note: who, what and which can be the subject. Compare:

- *Who* **comes** late every Monday morning? (*who* = subject → no auxiliary used)
- *Who* **do** you want to invite? (*who* = object ; *you* = subject → use 'do')
- *What* **happened**? (*what* = subject → no auxiliary used)
- *What* **did** you do? (*what* = object ; *you* = subject → use 'did')

Note the position of the prepositions in these questions:

- *Who* **did** you speak to?
- *What* **are** you looking at?
- *Where* **does** he come from?

Indirect Questions

Word order in an indirect question is the same as in a normal statement sentence:

subject + verb + object

Direct questions	Indirect questions
Where can I buy ink?	Can you tell me where I can buy ink? Can you tell me where can I buy ink?
Why do you want to work for us?	He asked me why I wanted to work for them. He asked me why did I want to work for them.
What is your reference number ?	What I'm asking is what your reference number is . What I'm asking is what is your reference number.
How much did it cost ?	Do you know how much it cost ? Do you know how much did it cost?

Phrases for Indirect Questions:

- Could you tell me...
- Do you know...
- I was wondering...
- Do you have any idea...
- I'd like to know...
- Would it be possible...
- Is there any chance...

Replying to Questions

Welcoming a question

That's a good question.
That's interesting.
Thank you for this question.

Clarifying a question

If I understand you correctly, you are saying/asking ...
I didn't quite catch that.
Could you repeat please?
I'm not sure I understood your question.

Avoiding giving an answer

Perhaps we could deal with that later.
I'm afraid that's not my field.
I'm sure Mr ... could answer that question.
I haven't researched the question any further but I can recommend a number of articles / websites to you that you'll find helpful if you're interested in the subject.

Checking the questioner is satisfied

Does that answer your question?
Is that clear?
May we go on?