

## Types of Questions in English

### 1. "Yes/No" Questions

This type of question is usually the easiest to ask and answer in English. They're called "yes/no questions" because the answer to these questions is generally "yes" or "no."

#### **How to form yes/no questions**

Basic structure for yes/no questions:

**[Auxiliary Verb] + [Subject] + [Main Verb] + [Object or Other Information] + ?**

#### **Examples of yes/no questions:**

##### **Present simple examples**

The present simple tense is used to talk about things that are always true, or things that generally or frequently happen. Here are some question examples:

- *Do you like English?*
- *Does your sister live in Boston?*

**Careful:** Exception! If the main verb of the sentence is some form of "to be," it goes in the auxiliary position. Here are a few examples:

- *Are you lost?*
- *Am I okay?*
- *Is your mom German?*

There is no second verb in the four examples above, so you go directly to the "other information."

##### **Present continuous examples**

This is also called "present progressive." When you use this tense, you want to indicate that something is happening right now, so use some form of the verb "to be" and a verb that ends with "-ing."

- *Are you watching the news right now?*
- *Is your teacher wearing a tie?*
- *Are your parents planning a vacation?*

##### **Present perfect examples**

The present perfect tense is used to talk about things that started in the past, but are still true or relevant now. For example:

- *Have you seen my car keys?*
- *Has your dad watched the new "Star Wars" movie yet?*
- *Have we reached our sales goals for this year?*

##### **Present perfect continuous examples**

Perfect tenses can also be made continuous. You can do that if you want to talk about something that started in the past, but you want to emphasize that it's still actively happening now. For example:

- *Have you been studying at this university for a long time?*
- *Has your dog been feeling sick the whole day?*
- *Have your parents been living here since they were children?*

### **Past simple examples**

Use the past simple tense when you want to talk about actions that were completed in the past. To do that, put the auxiliary in the past form (usually "did").

- *Did you say my name?*
- *Did the boss leave the meeting?*
- *Did your friends drink all the wine?*

**Careful:** Exception! This is similar to the exception for the simple present. If the main verb of the sentence is some form of "to be," then put the simple past form of "to be" in the auxiliary position. Again, a second verb isn't necessary. For example:

- *Were you ready?*
- *Was Jeremy at the group dinner last Thursday?*
- *Were your brothers all sports fans when they were young?*

### **Past continuous examples**

Use the past continuous when you want to talk about completed past actions that continued for a period of time. To do this, use a past form of the verb "to be" for the auxiliary and the "-ing" form for the main verb.

- *Were you talking to me?*
- *Was Theresa working yesterday at 4:00 p.m.?*
- *Was I wearing this shirt the last time you saw me?*

### **Past perfect examples**

This tense is less common, but it's still useful. It uses the auxiliary "had" plus the past participle of the verb. You can use the past perfect to show one event happened before another in the past. The earlier events use the past perfect and the more recent events use the past simple. For example:

- *Had you been to Canada before you moved there?*
- *Had your mother played any other sports before she joined the softball team?*
- *Had Harry Potter used any magic before he went to Hogwarts?*

### **Past perfect continuous examples**

This is similar to the past perfect tense, but it indicates that the first action continued for a period of time. It uses the auxiliary “had,” and the main verb = “been” + the “-ing” verb.

This is even less common than the regular past perfect tense, but you can still see how it uses the same structure for yes/no questions:

- *Had you been studying English before you moved to Seattle?*
- *Had the dog been acting strange before you took him to the vet?*
- *Had they been waiting for long before you arrived?*

### **Future simple examples**

The most common type of future yes/no questions are ones that use the future simple tense.

You can use the future simple tense to ask about short actions in the future. These questions are actually very easy to make. Start the sentence with “will” as the auxiliary and use a simple (infinitive) verb for the main verb.

- *Will you call me tomorrow?*
- *Will the city government build a new parking lot next year?*
- *Will that dog try to bite me?*

### **Future continuous examples**

You can use this to talk about things that will happen for a period of time in the future. Start with “will” as the auxiliary verb and use “be” plus the “-ing” form of a verb.

- *Will you be waiting inside or at the ticket booth?*
- *Will they be arriving soon?*
- *Will she be singing when we get there?*

### **Future perfect examples**

These final two tenses are much less common. They’re also more complicated because you generally have to include more context information when you use them.

- *Will you have lived here long enough to vote in the next election?*
- *Will you have finished the marathon by this time tomorrow?*

### **Future perfect continuous examples**

- *When the school year ends, will you have been teaching there for 15 years?*
- *Will you have been running in the marathon for six hours by this time tomorrow?*

## **2. “Wh-” Questions**

These are called “wh-” questions because they usually start with a question word that begins with the letters “wh.” Sometimes they’re also called “open questions.” That’s because there are many more possible answers than just yes/no.

### **Question words for “wh-” questions**

Most question words actually do start with “wh-,” with the exception of “how.” Here’s a quick review of the question words you should know and when to use them.

- **What:** Use “what” if you want information about an object or thing.
- **Which:** This is very similar to “what,” but generally use “which” if there are specific or limited options to choose from.
- **When:** Use “when” if you want information about a time or date.
- **Where:** Use “where” if you want information about a place or location.
- **Who:** Use “who” if you want information about a person.
- **Why:** Use “why” if you want information about a reason or explanation for something.

Some “wh-” question words start with “how”:

- **How:** Use “how” if you want information about the way or technique to do something.
- **How much:** Use “how much” if you want information about quantities of nouns that aren’t countable (like sugar, water, money, etc.).
- **How many:** Use “how many” if you want information about quantities of things that are countable (like people, bottles of water, dollars, etc.).
- **How often:** Use “how often” if you want information about the frequency of an event.
- **Other uses for “how”:** You can also use “how” plus an adjective (a descriptive word) if you want information about the degree or amount of an adjective. Examples can include “how tall,” “how beautiful,” “how young,” “how old” and many others.

### **Important note about question phrases:**

Some question “words” are actually phrases with multiple words. For example, I can start a question with “Where,” but I can also add a phrase, such as “Where in Germany.” There are many, many possibilities here, such as “How many times this month,” “When in March,” etc.

So you can have a question phrase with more than one word. But it will normally still go in the same position at the start of the sentence.

### **How to form “wh-” questions**

If you understand how to form yes/no questions, then it’s very easy to form “wh-” questions. Generally, just add a question word/phrase to the beginning of a yes/no question.

[“Wh-” Question Word/Phrase] + [Auxiliary Verb] + [Subject] + [Main Verb] + [Object or Other Information] + ?

[“Wh-” Question Word/Phrase] + [Auxiliary Verb] + [Subject] + [Main Verb] + [Object or Other Information] + ?

### Examples of “wh-” questions

We’ll look at these examples in the same order as in the first section, with some similar topics. I won’t include explanations about when and how to use each of the tenses unless there are differences between yes/no questions and “wh-” questions.

#### Present simple examples

- *Why do you like English?*
- *Which days do you go to the office?*
- *Where does your sister live?*

**Careful:** Exception! For some questions that start with “Who,” we don’t always know who the subject is. Because of that, we normally change the structure a bit. For example:

**Object Question:** *Who does your mom love?*

Here “your mom” is the subject. So after “who,” I include the auxiliary, then the subject, and then the verb. The question is asking about the object (the person your mom loves), so it’s called an object question.

**Subject Question:** *Who loves your mom?*

In this case, “who” is asking about the identity of the subject. “Your mom” is actually the object of this sentence. So I can eliminate the auxiliary and the subject. That may be a little confusing, since “your mom” is a person, but let’s see an example with a thing:

*Who loves pizza?*

Here it’s much clearer that there is no subject in the question, and that “pizza” is the object.

#### Present continuous examples

- *Who is watching the news right now?*
- *Why isn’t your teacher wearing a tie?*
- *What are your parents planning to do on vacation?*

#### Present perfect examples

This tense is more common with yes/no questions, but there are some times when you can make this tense into “wh-” questions.

- *Why haven’t you seen my car keys? You were the last person to drive the car!*
- *How many times has your dad watched the new “Star Wars” movie?*
- *How has your dog learned to sit on command?*

#### Present perfect continuous examples

- *Why have you been studying for so long? You need a break!*
- *Where has your sister been working this year?*
- *Why has your dog been acting strange all day?*

#### **Past simple examples**

- *Why did you say my name?*
- *When did your parents go to the grocery store?*
- *How did your cat catch the mouse?*

**Careful:** Exception! If the main verb of the sentence is some form of “to be,” then a second verb usually isn’t necessary. For example:

- *When were you at work?*
- *Why was your mom in Germany last week?*
- *Who was in Brooklyn last night?*

#### **Past continuous examples**

- *Where were your children walking to yesterday?*
- *Why were you talking to him after the interview?*
- *What were the hippos eating when you saw them at the zoo?*

#### **Past perfect examples**

- *How many times had you been to Canada before you moved there?*
- *Why hadn’t your mother played any other sports before she started softball?*
- *When had Harry Potter used magic before he went to Hogwarts?*

#### **Past perfect continuous examples**

- *How often had your mother been practising softball before she joined the team?*
- *Why hadn’t she been working for the government before she ran for president?*
- *What had the dog been eating before he got sick?*

#### **Future simple examples**

- *When will you call me tomorrow, in the morning or after work?*
- *Where will the city government build a new parking lot?*
- *How much will you pay your daughter to cut the grass?*

#### **Future continuous examples**

- *Where will you be staying when you go to the beach for vacation?*
- *Where will you be living two years from now?*

- *Why will you be sleeping tomorrow afternoon?*

### **Future perfect examples**

Remember that these final two tenses are much less common. If you use them, include more context information.

- *Why won't you have lived here long enough to vote in the next election?*
- *When will you have finished the marathon?*

### **Future perfect continuous examples**

- *How long will you have been living here by the time you're able to vote?*
- *How will you have been running in the marathon for six hours by this time tomorrow?*

## **A Note About Negative Questions**

Normally, we don't make yes/no questions into negative questions because it makes them too confusing. But it's no problem to make "wh-" questions negative.

To make a negative question, you just have to add "**not**" to the sentence. There are two basic possibilities:

### **1. As a contraction with the auxiliary.**

This is much more common, especially in spoken English. It's also used often with the question word "why." For example:

- *Why **don't** you speak Japanese?*
- *Why **hasn't** your cousin called me yet?*
- *Why **won't** you come to my birthday party?*

### **2. As "not," after the subject.**

This sounds a little more formal, but you can definitely use it if you're not comfortable with contractions. For example:

- *Why do you **not** speak Japanese?*
- *Why has your cousin **not** called me yet?*
- *When are you **not** busy?*