

## INDIRECT QUESTIONS

- **DIRECT vs. INDIRECT QUESTIONS**

- **Direct questions**

- are appropriate for people you know well
- can seem abrupt, unpolite or even aggressive, in English, to people you don't know very well or in professional or official situations
  - We already know how to form direct questions at this level
    - To be: Reverse *Subject-Verb to Verb-Subject*: "Are you an Engineer?"
    - Regular verbs: Use *Auxiliary Verb "To do"*: "What did you do last weekend?"
    - Modal verbs: *Subject-Verb to Verb-Subject*: "Can you Speak Russian?"

- **Indirect Questions**

- are a bit more formal and polite (they can be somewhat (but vaguely) comparable to the use of Ud./Uds. in Spanish but are far more generally and universally used than Ud./Uds. are in Spanish) and often used with
  - People you don't know: e.g. asking for directions to a place on the street
  - Professionally: e.g. a boss, a colleague (you don't know very well, or, who you have to ask a gentle question of)
  - Officially: e.g. a police officer, a civil servant, a doctor/nurse
  - Anybody else: anybody you don't know and need to ask something of politely
- may be used
  - To ask a question of somebody: e.g. "Do you know if John will return from his vacations this week?"
  - To request information off somebody: e.g. "Could you tell me if the bank is open on Saturday?"
  - For "Can" as a request permission of somebody: e.g. "Would you mind if I opened the window?"
  - For "Can" as a request somebody do something: e.g. "Would you be able to come to a meeting tomorrow?"
  - For "Can" as a question of ability: e.g. "Would it be possible for you to send me the report by close-of-day?"

## INDIRECT QUESTIONS

- **INDIRECT QUESTIONS: General Information**

- **Types of Questions:** Generally, there are two types of questions

- **Yes/No Questions:** "Is the bank open today?" – Answer: "Yes" or "No"
  - A Yes/No Question can often indirectly be asking for information: e.g. "Do you know if the client is still visiting us today?"
    - Although the question is a Yes/No, an answer of "Yes" or "No" is actually inappropriate
    - The question actually inferred is: "When is the client visiting us?"
- **Information Questions:** "Where is the closest bank?" – Answer: With the appropriate information

- **There is a slightly different form of Indirect Question for both types of Direct Question**

- **Yes/No Questions:** *Indirect Question Intro. + if/whether + Positive Statement form of the Direct Question*
  - There is a special case with "can" (question of ability, a request of someone to do something or permission to do something or to do something) covered later in this document
- **Information Questions:** *Indirect Question Intro. + Wh- Phrase + Positive Statement form of the Direct Question*

- **Description of Sections: There are 3 parts to the structure of each Indirect Q. type (four parts in total) the middle being different**

- **Indirect Question Intro.:** *(Both Yes/No and Information Questions)*
  - This is the initial part that applied to both Yes/no and Information Indirect Questions
  - These are various set phrases. There is a selection to choose from.
    - Some are in a question form (these are marked with a Question Mark (?) in the table)
    - Some are in a statement form (these do not have a Question Mark in the table)
    - They can have slightly different meanings so must be appropriate for the Direct Question they represent
      - ❖ For example, "Do you know if you are an Engineer?" is unlikely to be appropriate
- **If/Whether:** *(These only apply to Yes/No Direct Questions)*
  - If and Whether are synonymous and interchangeable in this context
  - They are always followed by a Subject
- **Wh- Phrase:** *(This only applies to Information Direct Questions)*
  - These are sometimes a simple Wh- question word
  - These are sometimes a longer phrase
  - There can sometimes be a choice of either a Wh- question or a longer Wh- phrase
  - They are always followed by a Subject
- **Positive Statement Form of Direct Question:** *(Both Yes/No and Information Questions)*
  - This is the final part that applies to both the Yes/No and Information Indirect Questions
  - As it is the Positive Statement Form it follows the general Subject + Verb form
    - It can be thought of as the beginning of the full form of the answer to the Direct Question
    - If the main verb is "To be" this generally comes at the end of the Information Indirect Question
    - You need to be careful of new Subject-Verb agreements with the change to the Positive Statement Form.

## INDIRECT QUESTIONS

**TABLE: COMPARISON of GENERAL STRUCTURES**

QUESTION TYPE	Part 1		Part 2		Part 3
<b>Yes/No Question</b>	<u>Indirect Question Intro.</u> Could/Can you tell me...? Do you know...? I wonder... I was wondering...	+	if / whether	+	Positive Statement Form of Direct Question
<b>Information Question</b>	I was wondering (if you know)...? Do you have any idea...? I'd like to know... Would it be possible...? Is there any chance...? Would you mind telling me...? Do you happen to know...? Please, tell me... Excuse me, I need to know... Could you let me know...? Do you understand...? I'm trying to find out...		Wh- Phrase		

## INDIRECT QUESTIONS

- **YES/NO INDIRECT QUESTIONS**

- There is one general form of Yes/No Indirect Questions. The structure is:
  - **Indirect Question Intro. + if/whether + Positive Statement form of the Direct Question**
- There are also extra options for “Can” (also may and could) as a question of ability of somebody to do something or a request to do something (please note that there are overlaps where they are both for ability and requests).
  - for “Can” as a question of ability of somebody to do something and/or a request for somebody to do something. The structures are:
    - **Would it be possible for (+ Subject) + infinitive & Complement**
    - **Would (Subject) be able + infinitive & Complement**
  - There is also an extra option for “Can” as a question of a request of somebody to do something only. The structure is:
    - **Would you mind + Gerund & Complement**
      - This does not work as a question of ability of somebody to do something
- In addition, there is an extra option for “Can” as a question of request for permission to do something
  - **Would you mind + if + Positive Statement Form of Request (in Present Simple or in Past Simple of Main Verb)**

TABLE: YES/NO QUESTION STRUCTURE WITH EXAMPLE

QUESTION TYPE	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3
GENERAL Yes/No Direct Question	Is it a bank holiday this Monday?		
GENERAL Yes/No Indirect Question	Do you know...	...if / whether...	...it is a bank holiday this Monday?
ABILITY/REQUEST Yes/No Direct Question	Can you finish the report by the end of the day?		
ABILITY/REQUEST Yes/No Indirect Question	Would you be able...	-	...to finish the report by the end of the day?
	Would it be possible for...	...you...	...to finish the report by the end of the day?
REQUEST ONLY Yes/No Indirect Question	Would you mind...	-	...finishing the report by the end of the day?
PERMISSION Yes/No Direct Question	Can I open the window?		
PERMISSION Yes/No Indirect Question	Would you mind...	...if...	...I open the window?
			...I opened the window?

\*N.B. Please note colour references between the table and the descriptions above.

## INDIRECT QUESTIONS

- **INFORMATION INDIRECT QUESTIONS**

- **There is one form of Information Indirect Questions.** The structure is:
  - Indirect Question Intro. + Wh- Phrase + Positive Statement form of the Direct Question

**TABLE: GENERAL INFORMATION QUESTION STRUCTURE WITH EXAMPLE**

QUESTION TYPE	Part 1		Part 2		Part 3
Information Direct Question	Where is the nearest bank?				
Information Indirect Question	Have you any idea...		...where...		...the nearest bank is?

- As an example of where you can have options (long and short) of the Wh-Phrase, consider the following:

QUESTION TYPE	Part 1		Part 2		Part 3
Information Direct Question	How often in your job do you have to travel?				
Information Indirect Question (with long Wh- Phrase)	Can you tell me...		...how often in your job...		...you have to travel?
Information Indirect Question (with short Wh- Phrase)	I was wondering...		...how often...		...you have to travel, in your job.