

Grammar Reference

Subject-object questions

Meaning and use

A simple way of asking questions in English is by using **interrogatives**, or **question words**, such as **who** or **what**. These questions are called **wh-questions** and are used when asking for information.

What time is it?

Who ate the biscuits?

Look at this sentence:

Sally met David Beckham.

We can ask about the **subject** or **object** of this sentence:

Asking about the subject: *Who met David Beckham?* *Sally met David Beckham.*

Asking about the object: *Who did Sally meet?* *Sally met David Beckham.*

The first question is a **subject question** because **who** refers to the **subject**. There is no auxiliary. The second question is an **object question** because **who** refers to the **object** and comes before the auxiliary **did**.

Form

Subject questions with no auxiliary are formed with: **question word + verb + object**, where the verb agrees with the subject.

'Who speaks Japanese?' 'Kento speaks Japanese.'

'Who rang the doorbell?' 'The milkman rang the doorbell.'

'What caused the accident?' 'Bad weather caused the accident.'

Whose and **which** ask about **possession** and **choice**, and can be used in subject questions like this:

Whose horse finished the race first?

Which painting cost the most?

Take note: using 'what' or 'which'

As well as **which**, **what** is also used to ask about **choices**. If the choice is limited, we use **which** and this is usually followed by a noun.

What social networks do you use?

What happened to your shirt?

Which chair is yours?

Which of these restaurants has the best service?

Which hand do you write with?

Spoken English

In casual speech, **who is** or **who has** often becomes **who's**. This can cause problems for the listener because it sounds the same as the question word **whose**, which is used to show **possession**. **Whose** usually comes before a **noun**.

Who's coming for dinner?

Whose bike got stolen?

Whose hat cost over £100?

Whose mobile phone still has a signal?

