

Grammar Reference

Question tags

What do question tags mean and what do we use them for?

Basically, **question tags** work by turning a statement into a question by adding a tag at the end. The tag is a short yes or no question, and we use different tags depending on the statement. Here are a couple of examples:

*You're here for the interview today, **aren't you**?* (Compare with: Are you here for the interview?)

*You haven't filled all the vacancies yet, **have you**?* (Compare with: Have you filled all the vacancies yet?)

The tag asks if the statement is true and makes it into a question. We use question tags more often when we are speaking than when we are writing.

How do we make question tags?

We can see that question tags are either positive or negative. If the statement part is positive, the tag is negative. If the statement is negative, then the question tag part is positive. The subject of the statement always appears as a pronoun in the tag.

*You **can** fill out the application form without any problems, **can't** you?* (Positive statement, negative question tag.)

*You **haven't** finished interviewing all the candidates, **have** you?* (Negative statement, positive question tag.)

If the main statement has an auxiliary verb, then the question tag is made with the same auxiliary verb.

Positive statements with question tags

*We **are** meeting this afternoon, **aren't** we?*

*You **have** prepared the spreadsheet, **haven't** you?*

*You **will** be on time for the workshop, **won't** you?*

*You **can** join us for the business lunch, **can't** you?*

*This **is** going to change our products forever, **isn't** it?*

For **positive** statements without auxiliary verbs, we use **do** to make the question tag:

*The new bosses like the idea, **don't** they?*

*He always gives a good presentation, **doesn't** he?*

*All the interviewees arrived on time, **didn't** they?*

Negative statements with question tags

*The job situation **isn't** getting any better, **is** it?*

*We **haven't** had so many candidates interested before, **have** we?*

*Our new boss **doesn't** like to have fun, **does** she?*

*I just **can't** get this presentation right, **can** I?*

When a form of **be** is the main verb in the statement, we use the matching form in the tag.

*She **is** qualified, **isn't** she?*

*They **were** impressed by the sales figures, **weren't** they?*

*It **isn't** that difficult to understand, **is** it?*

*We **weren't** ready for the tax increase, **were** we?*

There is a special case if the pronoun is **I** and we use **be** in the statement. The tag is made with **am** when the statement is negative - but when the statement is positive, the tag is made with **aren't**.

*I'm not the right person for the job, **am** I?*

*I'm in the right building for the interview, **aren't** I?*

Spoken English

In some ways, question tags are not real questions; that is, the speaker is not asking for new information. Instead, the speaker may be asking for agreement, or trying to start a conversation or keep one going.

The intonation of a tag in a question is important. When someone uses falling intonation in a tag, they think that the statement is true. They use the question tag to invite conversation.

When someone uses rising intonation in a question tag, he is less certain that the statement before the question tag is correct. The question tag here is a real question – the speaker wants to find out if the statement is really true.

