

GRAMMAR GOLDEN RULES: QUESTION TAGS

+
Positive statement,

It's a sunny day,

-
negative tag?

isn't it?



-
Negative statement,

You haven't eaten,

+
positive tag?

have you?



Question tags

- turn a statement into **questions**.
- are used to check/confirm what we know/think is true.
- are made using an **auxiliary verb*** (e.g. is, have) and a **subject pronoun** (e.g. I, you, he)
- We contract negative question tags, e.g. It's a sunny day, **isn't it**? (not 'is it not')
- If the main clause is positive, the question tag is negative, e.g. It's a sunny day (+), isn't it (-)?
- If the main clause is negative, the question tag is positive. e.g. You haven't eaten (-), have you (+)?
- If there is an **auxiliary verb*** in the main clause, we use the same verb in the question tag, e.g.
 - ...*is*..., *isn't*...?
 - ...*haven't*..., *have*...?
- If there is no auxiliary verb in the main clause, use do / does / did, e.g.
 - Sam *lives* (= _____) here, **doesn't** he?

* List of **auxiliary verbs**: be (is, am, are, was, were, being), have (had, has, having), do (did, does, doing), can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must

A. Tags At A Glance



TENSE		+ STATEMENT, - TAG	- STATEMENT, + TAG
1	Present simple	He's Chinese, isn't he ?	We aren't wrong, are we ?
2	Present simple (other verbs)	They live in the city, don't they ?	She doesn't like pink, does she ?
3	Present continuous	She's singing tonight, isn't she ? (She's = She _____)	He isn't inviting us, is he ?
4	Past simple	He was late yesterday, wasn't he ?	They weren't here last week, were they ?
5	Past simple (other verbs)	She came home early yesterday, didn't she ?	They didn't plan the party well, did they ?
6	Past continuous	He was working, wasn't he ?	You weren't fighting, were you ?

	TENSE	+ STATEMENT, - TAG	- STATEMENT, + TAG
7	Present perfect	She's been to Korea, hasn't she? (She's been = She _____ been)	You haven't met Tom, have you?
8	Present perfect continuous	She's been sleeping all day, hasn't she?	They haven't been cleaning their house, have they?
9	Past perfect	He'd left the house, hadn't he? (He'd = He _____)	He hadn't forgotten me, had he?
10	Past perfect continuous	They'd been trying, hadn't they?	I hadn't been exercising, had I?
11	Future simple	He'll be home soon, won't he?	They won't help us, will they?
12	Future continuous	She'll be coming, won't she ?	He won't be working tonight, will he?
13	Future perfect	You'll have finished by ten, won't you?	She won't have left home before eight, will she?
14	Modal Verb	You can do this, can't you?	He can't help us, can he?
15	Modal Verb	They'd clean up, wouldn't they? (They'd = They _____)	We wouldn't know the result today, would we?

B. Look out for these (or similar) adverbs of frequency which make statements negative (-)

	- STATEMENT	+ TAG
1	I seldom (-) see you,	do I?
2	She is hardly (-) punctual,	is she?
3	He has never/not (-) travelled overseas,	has he?
4	They rarely (-) eat out,	do they?
5	We could scarcely (-) hear the speaker,	could we?
6	I barely (= hardly) (-) know you,	do I?

Special note: She was **barely** (= only just) (+) two when she could read, wasn't she? [Compare with B6.]

Let's Practise!



• **Steps:**

- Work out what the **contractions** mean, e.g. 'she's 'can mean 'she is 'or 'she has'
- Mark out any words which make the statement **negative**, e.g. seldom, no one

1. He is the eldest in the family, _____?
2. Ben hardly attends the soccer practice, _____?
3. She can finish her work, _____?

4. Luke didn't enjoy the show, _____?
5. Aunt Grace is visiting us tonight, _____?
6. Susan will keep her promise, _____?
7. You won't betray me, _____?
8. If you do not hand in your work on time, you will be punished, _____?
9. "Sue has never swum in the sea, _____?" asked Mike.
10. We hardly talk nowadays, _____?
11. She seldom comes on time, _____?
12. We'd never have known, _____?
13. I've been here before, _____?
14. He's eaten, _____?
15. You should not have lied, _____?



Special Cases

STATEMENT	TAG
I am right,	aren't I?
You have to go, He has a dog, <i>[You (do) have to go..., he (does) have a dog... More common to use the 'do' form than 'have' form.]</i>	don't you? doesn't he?
Nothing happened this morning, Nobody likes working on Sunday, <i>[Treat statements with nothing, nobody etc like negative statements]</i>	did it? do they?
Let's go for a ride, <i>[let's = let us]</i>	shall we?
She used to work here, <i>[With 'used to', use 'didn't in tag]</i>	didn't she?
We ought to be polite, <i>[With 'ought (not) to', 'should or shouldn't' are most commonly used.]</i>	shouldn't we?
Close the door, <i>[With imperatives (e.g. <u>Do</u> this, <u>Come</u> here, <u>Stop</u> shouting), use 'will you']</i>	will you?

STATEMENT	TAG
Someone will lock up the room, <i>[If the subject is nobody, somebody, everybody, no one, someone or everyone, use "they" in the tag question.]</i>	won't they?
Jean forgot to close the windows, [= Jean <i>did forget to...</i>] Aaron often lies , [= Aaron <i>does often lie...</i>] <i>[+ statements: do not interpret the meaning of the verbs 'forgot' and 'lies' and think of the statements as negative]</i>	didn't she? doesn't he?

For Interest: Pronunciation

If we don't know the answer and are asking a real question, we use a rising intonation with the tag question.

You don't know how to solve this, do you? ↗

If we know the answer and are just confirming the information, we use a falling intonation with the tag question.

This song is the latest hit, isn't it? ↘

Reference:

<https://www.englishclub.com/grammar/verbs-questions-tag-examples.htm>

<http://www.perfect-english-grammar.com/tag-questions.html>

<http://www.eslbase.com/grammar/tag-questions>

Let's Practise!



- 16 I am early, _____?
- 17 She has a lot of work to catch up, _____?
- 18 I couldn't help it as I was angry, _____?
- 19 Stop talking, _____?
- 20 Let's go for a holiday, _____?
- 21 You used to like swimming, _____?
- 22 We ought to leave now, _____?
- 23 You were late for work, _____?
- 24 Nothing will happen, _____?
- 25 Everyone is present, _____?
- 26 You forgot to hand in your work, _____?