

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

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

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

	- STATEMENT	+ TAG
1	I <b>seldom</b> (-) see you,	do I?
2	She is <b>hardly</b> (-) punctual,	is she?
3	He has <b>never/not</b> (-) travelled overseas,	has he?
4	They <b>rarely</b> (-) eat out,	do they?
5	We could <b>scarcely</b> (-) hear the speaker,	could we?
6	I <b>barely</b> (= 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 <b>am</b> right,	<b>aren't I?</b>
You <b>have</b> to go, He <b>has</b> a dog, <i>[You (do) have to go..., he (does) have a dog... More common to use the 'do' form than 'have' form.]</i>	<b>don't you?</b> <b>doesn't he?</b>
<b>Nothing</b> happened this morning, <b>Nobody</b> likes working on Sunday, <i>[Treat statements with nothing, nobody etc like negative statements]</i>	<b>did it?</b> <b>do they?</b>
<b>Let's</b> go for a ride, <i>[let's = let us]</i>	<b>shall we?</b>
She <b>used to</b> work here, <i>[With 'used to', use 'didn't in tag]</i>	<b>didn't she?</b>
We <b>ought to</b> be polite, <i>[With 'ought (not) to', 'should or shouldn't' are most commonly used.]</i>	<b>shouldn't we?</b>
Close the door, <i>[With imperatives (e.g. <u>Do</u> this, <u>Come</u> here, <u>Stop</u> shouting), use 'will you']</i>	<b>will you?</b>

STATEMENT	TAG
<b>Someone</b> 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>	<b>won't they?</b>
Jean <b>forgot</b> to close the windows, [= Jean <u>did forget</u> to...] Aaron often <b>lies</b> , [= Aaron <u>does</u> often <u>lie</u> ...] <i>[+ statements: do not interpret the meaning of the verbs 'forgot' and 'lies' and think of the statements as negative]</i>	<b>didn't she?</b> <b>doesn't he?</b>

### 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, \_\_\_\_\_?