

Tags Questions

Definition

A tag question is a small question that is attached , or "tagged", to the end of a sentence. Rather than repeat the main verb, a form of "be" or other auxiliary verb or modal is used in the tag. Below are a few examples.

*You came by train, **didn't you?***

*It's very windy today, **isn't it?***

*You can meet me at the station, **can't you?***

*You couldn't give me a ride, **could you?***

Sentence Pattern

If the sentence is negative, the tag is usually positive, as in the example below.

*You didn't tell him, **did you?***

Note: *Sentences with negative words are considered to be negative. Therefore, they require positive tag question endings, as in these examples:*

*He never drinks alcohol, **does he?***

*Nobody left a message, **did they?***

If the sentence is positive, the tag is usually negative, as in the next example.

*You told him, **didn't you?***

Twelve Rules for Tag Questions

Rule	Example
1. After “let’s”, the tag begins with “shall”.	Let’s invite the neighbours over for dinner on the weekend, shall we?
2. Use “aren’t I” in tags to mean “I am not”.	I’m on time, aren’t I? (correct) I’m on time, am’t I? (incorrect)
3. Use “won’t” for polite request tags.	You’ll bring the other things, won’t you?
4. Use “will” or “would” with imperative sentences (commands).	Wait here until I return, will you? Wait here until I return, would you?
5. Use “mustn’t” with the modal “must”.	This must be the address, mustn’t it?
6. Two endings are possible when “have” is	You have enough money, haven’t you? (British

Rule	Example
the main verb of the sentence.	English) You have enough money, don't you? (North American English)
7. Use pronouns for people, not proper names, in question tags.	Paul is a good tennis player, isn't he? Betty has a good job, hasn't she?
8. Use "it" in a question tag when the sentence includes the words "this" or "that".	This is your pen, isn't it?
9. Use "they" in a question tag when the sentence includes "these" or "those".	Those are your sandals, aren't they?
10. Use "there"	There is a lot of

Rule	Example
<i>in a question tag when the sentences includes “there + a form of be”.</i>	<i>work to do today, isn’t there?</i>
<i>11. Use “they” in a question tag when the sentence includes indefinite pronouns (nobody, no one, someone, somebody, everyone, everybody).</i>	<i>Everyone is here now, aren’t they? Nobody has eaten yet, have they?</i>
<i>12. Use “didn’t” in a question tag when the sentence includes the verb “used to”.</i>	<i>You used to go skating very often, didn’t you?”</i>

Using Tag Questions

*Tag questions are used to ask for agreement or to ask for **things, favours, or new information**. To determine which, listen to*

the speaker's tone. A **rising tone** at the end of a tag question indicates that it is a real question. The speaker wants to know something or wants someone to do something. **Falling tone** however, means that the speaker is looking for agreement.

Rising tone - asking for a favour	You couldn't lend me some money, could you?
Rising tone – asking for information	You don't happen to know if the No. 50 bus has already passed here, do you?
Falling tone - asking for agreement	The boss wasn't in a good mood today, was he? That dress looks great on her, doesn't it?

Note: We usually use a negative sentence with a positive tag to request **things** or **information**, as in the preceding examples.

English tag questions can have a rising or a falling intonation pattern.[3] This can be contrasted with Polish, French or German, for example, where all tags rise, or with the Celtic languages, where all fall. As a rule, the English rising pattern is used when soliciting information or motivating an action, that is, when some sort of response is required. Since normal English yes/no questions have rising patterns (e.g. Are you coming?), these tags make a grammatical statement into a real question:

- You're coming, **aren't you?**

- Do listen, **will you?**
- Let's have a beer, **shall we?**

The falling pattern is used to underline a statement. The statement itself ends with a falling pattern, and the tag sounds like an echo, strengthening the pattern. Most English tag questions have this falling pattern.

- He doesn't know what he's doing, **does he?**
- This is really boring, **isn't it?**

Sometimes the rising tag goes with the positive to positive pattern to create a confrontational effect:

- He was the best in the class, **was he?** (rising: the speaker is challenging this thesis, or perhaps expressing surprised interest)
- He was the best in the class, **wasn't he?** (falling: the speaker holds this opinion)
- Be careful, **will you?** (rising: expresses irritation)
- Take care, **won't you?** (falling: expresses concern)

Sometimes the same words may have different patterns depending on the situation or implication.

- You don't remember my name, **do you?** (rising: expresses surprise)
- You don't remember my name, **do you?** (falling: expresses amusement or resignation)
- Your name's Mary, **isn't it?** (rising: expresses uncertainty)
- Your name's Mary, **isn't it?** (falling: expresses confidence)

As an all-purpose tag the Multicultural London English set-phrase *innit* (for "isn't it") is only used with falling patterns:

- He doesn't know what he's doing, **innit?**
- He was the best in the class, **innit?**

On the other hand, the adverbial tag questions (alright? OK? etc.) are almost always found with rising patterns. An occasional exception is surely.

Other forms

Besides the standard form based on auxiliary verbs, there are other forms specific to particular regions or dialects of English. These are generally invariant, regardless of verb, person or negativity.

The tag *right?* is common in a number of dialects across the UK and US, as well as in Indian English. It is an example of an invariable tag which is preferred in American English over traditional tags.

The tags *isn't it?* and *no?* are used in Indian English.

The tag *is* is of Scottish origin, and can be heard across much of Scotland, New Zealand, Canada and the North-Eastern United States. In Central Scotland (in and around Stirling and Falkirk), this exists in the form *eh no?* which is again invariant.

The tag *or?* is used commonly in the North-Eastern United States and other regions to make offers less imposing. These questions could always logically be completed by stating the opposite of the offer, though this effect is understood intuitively by native speakers. For example:

- *Would you like another drink, or (would you not)?*
- *Did you want to go to the park together, or (did you not want to go)?*