**Question Tags – Reading Material**

**Overview:**

What do you do to instigate another person to make a comment or keep the conversation open?

Well, the answer is Question Tags. It's not just used for this purpose but the main purpose would be to confirm expected information or question unexpected information.

**Objectives:**

This reading material is designed to help you:

* Understand and learn to encourage a reply from the person you are speaking to.
* Learn its application and how to vary your voice to express surprise and check information.

**Question Tags**

Question tags are small questions "tagged" on to the end of a sentence to make a question.

Example:

Sentence:- She speaks English. Question:- Does she speak English?

Question Tag:- She speaks English, **doesn't she**?

**Form**

Question tags are made from an auxiliary verb and the subject. If the sentence is affirmative, we usually use a negative tag.

Example:

That**'s** a great song, **isn't** it? She**'s** a lawyer, **isn't** she?

If the sentence is negative, the tag is positive. For example:

You'**re not** busy, **are** you?

This way **isn't** right, **is** it?

The auxiliary verb and subject in the question tag match those in the main sentence. Only the positive and negative past changes.

Example:

**He can** play the trumpet, **can**'t **he**?

-**You have**n't finished yet, **have you**?

Here the subject is in blue, and the auxiliary verb in green. It's just whether each part of the question is positive or negative that changes.

**Function**

Question tags have two main purposes:

1. to confirm expected information

2. to question unexpected information.

You can tell which function is being used by the voice - when the voice goes down it's checking expected information - when the voice goes up it's really asking a question.

Example:

Intonation going down - You haven't finished yet, have you?

I expect you haven't finished, I'm just checking.

Intonation going up - You haven't finished yet, have you?

I'm really asking if you're finished or not. If you are finished it's earlier than I expected, so

I'm surprised.

You're really busy now, aren't you? - Yes, I've got to finish this by Monday. I'm confirming you're busy now, possibly showing sympathy as well.

Why are you watching TV? You're really busy now, aren't you? - Not really, I did most of it last night.

I think you're busy but I'm surprised, you should be working not watching TV, so I'm asking about an unexpected situation.

Negative sentences with positive tags are often used for requests. Example:

You don't have a pencil, do you?

-You couldn't change a $5 bill, could you? Imperative questions tags usually use *will*.

Example:

Open the door for me, wil you? Hang on a minute, will you?

Unless used with informal language, question tags with imperatives can often sound impatient.

Question tags are an important part of natural speech and are particularly useful in small talk, as they help to confirm and affirm key information in a sympathetic way.

**Additional Usage**

***Use***

frequently used in spoken English when you want s.o. to agree or disagree

**Form**

positive statement ->question tag negative - **You are** Tom, **aren't you**?

negative statement->question tag positive - **He isn't** Joe, **is he**?

Examples:

with auxiliaries

**You've** got a car, **haven't you**?

without auxiliaries (use: don't, doesn't, didn't) **They play** football on Sundays, **don't they**? **She plays** football on Sundays, **doesn't she**? **They played** football on Sundays, **didn't they**?

Questions tags are used to keep a conversation going. You can agree or refuse to a sentence with a question tag.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **You go** to school, **don't you**? | |
| You agree. | You refuse. |
| Yes, I do. | No, I don't. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **You aren't** from Germany, **are you**? | |
| You agree. | You refuse. |
| No, I'm not. | Yes, I am. |

**Questions tags - Special**

Although the negative word **not** is not in the sentence, the sentence can be negative. Then we use the "positive" question tag.

**He never** goes out with his dog, **does he**?

**have is a main verb** in the sentence -> two possibilities (when referring to states)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **We have** a car, \_? | |
| **We have** a car, **haven't we**? | **We have** a car, **don't we**? |
| mostly British English | mostly American English |

We use **will/would** with the **imperative** (Simple Present).

**Open** the window, **will you**?

**Open** the window, **would you**?

**Don't open** your books, **will you**?

We use **won't** with a polite request.

**Open** the window, **won't you**?

We use **shall** after **Let's**.

**Let's** take the next bus, **shall we**?

Auxiliary **must**

We **must** be at home at 8 pm, **mustn't we**?

Yes, we **must**. No, we **needn't**.

**With auxiliary verbs**

The question tag uses the same verb as the main part of the sentence. If this is an auxiliary

verb (‘have’, ‘be’) then the question tag is made with the auxiliary verb.

• They’ve gone away for a few days, haven’t they?

• They weren’t here, were they?

• He had met him before, hadn’t he?

• This isn’t working, is it?

**Without auxiliary verbs**

If the main part of the sentence doesn’t have an auxiliary verb, the question tag uses an appropriate form of ‘do’.

• I said that, didn’t I?

• You don’t recognise me, do you?

• She eats meat, doesn’t she?

**With modal verbs**

If there is a modal verb in the main part of the sentence the question tag uses the same modal verb.

• They couldn’t hear me, could they?

• You won’t tell anyone, will you?

**With ‘I am’**

Be careful with question tags with sentences that start ‘I am’. The question tag for ‘I am’ is

‘aren’t I?’

• I’m the fastest, aren’t I?

**Intonation**

Question tags can either be ‘real’ questions where you want to know the answer or simply asking for agreement when we already know the answer.

If the question tag is a real question we use rising intonation. Our tone of voice rises. If we already know the answer we use falling intonation. Our tone of voice falls.