

English grammar rules

Question tags

Question tags are very common in spoken English. We usually use them when we more or less know the answer, but we want the listener to agree with us or confirm some information. It is also a way of involving the listener in the conversation.

The subject is always expressed by a pronoun.

Kate is younger than Jim, isn't she?

Your parents don't speak Spanish, do they?

Affirmative sentences

In affirmative sentences, the verbs in question tags are negative.

Verb to be

You're from Leeds, aren't you?

Ken is ill, isn't he?

The negative form of *I am* is *aren't I*.

I am your best friend, aren't I?

Modal verbs

Karen can swim, can't she?

He'd like to have a rest, wouldn't he?

You should apologize to her, shouldn't you?

The negative form of *must* is *mustn't*.

I must help you now, mustn't I?

The question tag of *let's* is *shall we*.

Let's go home, shall we?

Auxiliary verbs

Your parents have been here before, haven't they?

You will deliver the parcel tomorrow, won't you?

Main verbs

In sentences with main verbs (*play, read, live...*) we make the question tags with *do* or *did*.

Shops close at six, don't they?

They arrived in the morning, didn't they?

Everybody, everyone, somebody, someone

If the subject of a sentence is *everybody, everyone, somebody* or *someone* we use *they* to make the question tags.

Everyone was tired, weren't they?

Somebody called you, didn't they?

Negative sentences

In negative sentences, the verbs in question tags are positive.

Jill isn't working now, is she?

Bobby shouldn't eat so much, should he?

You hadn't met him before, had you?

Nobody, nothing, hardly ever, scarcely...

Expressions such as *nobody, nothing, no one, neither, hardly, hardly ever, scarcely, rarely* or *seldom* have a negative meaning. That is why the verbs in the question tags have positive forms.

Nothing was found, was it?

You hardly ever go dancing, do you?

She seldom works overtime, does she?

If the subject of a sentence is *anyone, anybody, no one* or *nobody* we use *they* to make the question tags.

I don't think anyone will accept it, will they?

No one wanted to go there, didn't they?

Rising and falling intonation

Rising intonation

The question tags with rising intonation are similar to normal questions. We want the listener to confirm some information, because we are not certain about it.

You live in Ghana, don't you?

She is twenty, isn't she?

We can also use the question tags if we want to make polite requests. In such cases, the intonation is rising.

You wouldn't take me with you, would you?

You can't help us with the luggage, can you?

Falling intonation

The question tags with falling intonation are not real questions. We just want the listener to agree with us.

It's so cold today, isn't it?

Tim has been to India, hasn't he?

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