

Question tags (do you? isn't it? etc.)

A. Study these examples:

You haven't seen Mary today, have you?

No, I'm afraid not.

It was a good film, wasn't it?

Yes. I really enjoyed it.

Have you? and wasn't it? are question tags (= mini-questions that we often put on the end of a sentence in spoken English). In question tags, we use an auxiliary verb (have/was/will etc.).

We use do/does/did for the present and past simple (see also Unit 50):

* 'Karen plays the piano, doesn't she?' 'Well, yes, but not very well.'

* 'You didn't lock the door, did you?' 'No, I forgot.'

B. Normally we use a negative question tag after a positive sentence:

positive sentence + negative tag

Mary will be here soon, won't she?

There was a lot of traffic, wasn't there?

Jim should pass the exam, shouldn't he?

... and a positive question tag after a negative sentence:

negative sentence + positive tag

Mary won't be late, will she?

They don't like us, do they?

You haven't got a car, have you?

Notice the meaning of yes and no in answer to a negative sentence:

* You're not going out today, are you? Yes. (Yes, I am going out)

* You're not going out today, are you? No. (No, I am not going out)

C. The meaning of a question tag depends on how you say it. If your voice goes down, you aren't really asking a question; you are only inviting the listener to agree with you:

* 'It's a nice day, isn't it?' 'Yes, lovely.'

* 'Tim doesn't look well today, does he?' 'No, he looks very tired.'

* 'She's very pretty. She's got beautiful eyes, hasn't she?'

But if the voice goes up, it is a real question:

* 'You haven't seen Mary today, have you?' 'No, I'm afraid not.'

(= Have you seen Mary today by any chance?)

We often use a negative sentence + positive tag to ask for things or information, or to ask somebody to do something. The voice goes up at the end of the tag in sentences like these:

* 'You haven't got a pen, have you?' 'Yes, here you are.'

* 'You couldn't do me a favour, could you?' 'It depends what it is.'

* 'You don't know where Karen is, do you?' 'Sorry, I've no idea.'

D. After Let's... the question tag is ... shall we?:

Let's go for a walk, shall we?

After the imperative (Do.../Don't do... etc.), the tag is usually ... will you?:

Open the door, will you?

Don't be late, will you?

Note that we say ... aren't I? (= am I not?):

I'm late, aren't I?

EXERCISES

1 Put a question tag on the end of these sentences.

1. Tom won't be late, will he? No, he's never late.
2. You're tired, aren't you? Yes, a little.
3. You've got a camera, ---? Yes, why? Do you want to borrow it?
4. You weren't listening, ---? Yes, I was!
5. Sue doesn't know Ann, ---? No, they've never met.
6. Jack's on holiday, ---? Yes, he's in Portugal.
7. Ann's applied for the job, ---? Yes, but she won't get it.
8. You can speak German, ---? Yes, but not very fluently.
9. He won't mind if I use his phone, ---? No, of course he won't.
10. There are a lot of people here, ---? Yes, more than I expected.
11. Let's go out tonight, ---? Yes, let's.
12. This isn't very interesting, ---? No, not very.
13. I'm too impatient, ---? Yes, you are sometimes.
14. You wouldn't tell anyone ---? No, of course not.
15. Listen, ---? OK, I'm listening.
16. I shouldn't have lost my temper, ---? No, but never mind.
17. Don't drop that vase, ---? No, don't worry.
18. He'd never met her before, ---?, No, that was the first time.

2 Read the situation and write a sentence with a question tag. In each situation you are asking your friend to agree with you.

1. You look out of the window. The sky is blue and the sun is shining. What do you say to your friend? (beautiful day)

It's a beautiful day, isn't

2. You're with a friend outside a restaurant. You're looking at the prices, which are very high. What do you say? (expensive)

It ---

3. You've just come out of the cinema with a friend'. You really enjoyed the film. What do you say to your friend? (great)

The film ---

4. You and a friend are listening to a woman singing. You like her voice very much. What do you say to your friend? (a lovely voice)

She ---

5. You are trying on a jacket. You look in the mirror and you don't like what you see. What do you say to your friend? (not/took/very good)

It ---

6. Your friend's hair is much shorter than when you last met. What do you say to her/him? (have/your hair/cut)

You ---

7. You and a friend are walking over a wooden bridge. It is very old and some parts are broken. What do you say? (not/very safe)

This bridge ---

3 In these situations you are asking for information and asking people to do things.

1. You need a pen. Perhaps Jane has got one. Ask her.

Jane, you haven't got a pen. have you?

2. Jack is just going out. You want him to get you some stamps. Ask him.

Jack, you ---

3. You're looking for Ann. Perhaps Kate knows where she is. Ask her.

Kate, you ---

4. You need a bicycle pump. Perhaps Helen has got one. Ask her.

Helen ---

5. You're looking for your keys. Perhaps Robin has seen them. Ask him.

Answers :

1.3.haven't you
1.4.were you
1.5.does she
1.6.isn't he
1.7.hasn't she
1.8.can't you
1.9.will he
1.10.aren't there
1.11.shall we
1.12.is it
1.13.aren't I
1.14.would you
1.15.will you
1.16.should I
1.17.will you
1.18.had he

2.2.it's very expensive, isn't it?
2.3. the film was great, wasn't it?
2.4. she has got a lovely voice , doesn't she?
2.5. it doesn't look very good, does it?
2.6.you have had your hair cut, haven't you?
2.70 this bridge isn't very safe, is it?

3.2.Jack, you couldn't get me some stamps, could you?
3.3.Kate, you don't know where Ann is, do you?
3.4.Helen, you haven't got a bicycle pump, have you?
3.5.Robin, you haven't seen my keys, have you?