

# Indirect questions

## Introduction



Could you tell me where **the station is**, please?

## Definition

These are an alternative way to ask certain questions. For example:  
Could you tell me if **it's** ready? = Is it ready?

## Construction

They consist of two questions in one sentence. There are lots of possibilities. Here are a few examples:

First question	+	Second question
Could you tell me...	if/whether	... <b>there's</b> a canteen in this building?
Can you remember...	if/whether	... <b>we ordered</b> more paper?
Do you know...	who/what/which/where/ when/whose	... <b>it is</b> ?
Does anyone recall...	where	... <b>we put</b> the file?
Did she say...	how	... <b>she fixed</b> it?
Can you confirm...	how much/many	... <b>we need</b> ?

Do you have any idea...	how long	...it will take?
Would you mind explaining...	how	...you're going to solve this problem?

## Note that

1. In the first question, we use the usual word order for interrogatives but in the second question, we do not:

Do you know what is it? ❌  
Do you know what it is? ✔️

Could you tell me where can I find a post office? ❌  
Could you tell me where I can find a post office? ✔️

Can you confirm what time does the conference start? ❌  
Can you confirm what time the conference starts? ✔️

An exception is when there is a **question word** in the second part that refers to a subject rather than an object. For example:

Can you tell me what's wrong? ✔️  
Do you know who will be there? ✔️

2. With 'whose', only one indirect form is correct:

Whose pen is this?      Do you know whose pen this is? ✔️  
Whose is this pen?      Do you know whose is this pen? ❌

3. We can also use question word + infinitive. For example:

Do you know...  
...what to do with this file?  
...when to take a coffee break?  
...where to go?  
...how many to bring?

Could you tell me...  
...how to get to the airport?  
...which computer to use?  
...whose ID to check?  
...who to invite?

## Uses

Use	Examples
To be more polite, especially when talking to a stranger or someone we don't know well.	Excuse me, do you know which platform <b>I need</b> for trains to Birmingham?  Can you tell me whether <b>it's</b> quicker to go by bus or train?
When we don't know if the person we're asking has the information we need.	Do you know if <b>there's</b> a team meeting this week?  Did you find out when <b>the parts will</b> arrive?
When there are simply two questions involved.	Did anyone ask whether <b>it's</b> OK for us to leave early?  Did you notice if <b>Frank was</b> in his office?

**Note that** we often begin with 'Excuse me' when approaching a stranger or interrupting someone to ask a question. We might also add 'please' at the end.

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