

# Question words: further information

## Introduction



**How? Whom? Which? Whose?**

## Definition

We use question words to ask for information.

## Introduction

There are lots of different constructions depending on the question words used.

## Uses

Question words	Use	Examples
How?	To ask about characteristics - what something is like.	<b>How</b> was your holiday? <b>How's</b> your new job?
	When talking about people, it relates to health and well-being.	<b>How</b> are you? <b>How's</b> your sister?
	[see note below]	

<b>How?</b>	<b>To ask about the way something is done.</b>  <b>Sometimes with adverbs of manner.</b>	<b>How</b> can I get to the station?  <b>How</b> did you solve the problem?  <b>How</b> fast can he swim?  <b>How</b> healthily do you eat?
<b>How long ?</b>	<b>To ask about length.</b>  <b>To ask about duration.</b>	<b>How long</b> is the Seine?  <b>How long</b> was the film?  <b>How long</b> have you worked for this company?  <b>How long</b> has it been raining?
<b>How often?</b>	<b>To ask about frequency.</b>	<b>How often</b> do you go to the cinema?
<b>How + other adjectives..?</b>	<b>To ask about a lot of different qualities.</b>	<b>How</b> big is your house?  <b>How</b> late were you for the meeting?  <b>How</b> successful will it be?  <b>How</b> far away is the Moon?
<b>How about..?</b>	<b>To make suggestions.</b>	<b>How about</b> going to that new Italian restaurant?  <b>How about</b> steak for dinner tonight?
<b>How come..?</b>	<b>An informal alternative to 'Why..?'</b>	<b>How come</b> you're not working today?  I heard that she didn't go to the meeting yesterday. <b>How come?</b>
<b>Which?</b>	<b>To ask about things.</b>	<b>Which</b> wine would you prefer? Red or white?
<b>Whom?</b>	<b>To ask about people.</b>	With <b>whom</b> did you discuss the report?
<b>Whose ?</b>	<b>To ask about possession.</b>	<b>Whose</b> wallet is this?

## Which

**Which** is similar to 'what' but is used when there is a more limited choice.

Compare:

**What** is your favorite food? [There are thousands of possible answers.]

and

**Which** Sunday newspaper do you read? [About 8 in England.]

**Note that** it is commonly used in quiz questions: **Which** country hosted the 2008 Olympics?

Here are some more examples:

**Which** team won the 2010 World Cup?

In **which** country is the River Thames?

**Which** French actor is in the English film, *Hamlet*?

**Which** side of the road do they drive on in America?

For **which** role did Simone Signoret win an Oscar for best actress in 1959?

## Whom

**Whom** is instead of 'who' in questions when it refers to the object. For example, you may hear on the phone:

To **whom** am I speaking? [very formal - some people avoid prepositions at the end of a sentence]

or

Who am I speaking to? [more natural and friendly]

Here are some more examples:

Formal	Informal
With <b>whom</b> did she go to the convention?	Who did she go to the convention with?
To <b>whom</b> does this belong?	Who does this belong to?
For <b>whom</b> is this present?	Who is this present for?
Can you tell me with <b>whom</b> she works?	Can you tell me who she works with?

**Note that**

## 1. We can't use **whom** when it refers to the subject:

Who likes chocolate?  Whom likes chocolate? 

## 2. We never start a question with 'whom'.

See also 'which' and 'whom' in [Relative pronouns](#).

## How

### Note that

#### 1. The meanings of these questions are sometimes confused:

**How** is she? [Is she well? Healthy?Happy?]

What is she like? [Personality, e.g. kind, generous, shy, has a sense of humour.]

What does she look like? [Physical characteristics, e.g. height, colour of hair.]

What does she like? [Things and activities, e.g. chocolate, tennis, travelling.]

#### 2. The expression '**How** do you do?' used to have a similar meaning to '**How** are you?' Nowadays, it's a rarely used old-fashioned, formal alternative to 'Nice to meet you'. Note the differences in meanings and the correct responses:

"**How** do you do?" "**How** do you do?" [first meeting]

"Nice to meet you." "Nice to meet you, too." [first meeting]

"**How** are you?" "Fine thanks. And you?" [later meetings in the UK and often in first meetings in the US]

#### Informal alternatives to '**How** are you?' include:

"**How**'s it going?" "Oh, not bad, thanks."

"**How** are things (with you)?" "Everything's pretty good at the moment."

"**How** are you doing?" "I'm doing great!"

# Examples



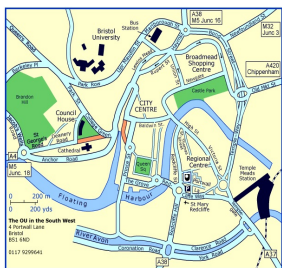
Which way shall I go?



To whom is he giving these flowers?



"How was your flight?"  
"Great, thanks - no delays this time."



"How far is it from the shopping centre to the cathedral?"  
"Only half a mile."  
"How long will it take to walk there?"  
"About 10 minutes."



"How long have they known each other?"  
"Since they were at school."



"How did he fix the tap?"  
"By replacing a valve, I think."  
"If it was so easy, how come it took him so long to do it?!"

See also whose/who's.



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