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.**	**How was your holiday?**
		How's your new job?
	When talking about people, it relates to health and well-being.	**How are you?**
		How's your sister?
	[see note below]	

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



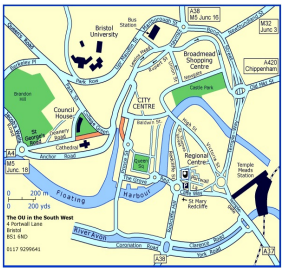
Which way shall I go?



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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