Asking questions L4.00

“Do you like video games?” “Yes, we do.”

Construction

These are the basic forms for constructing questions:

‘To be’	(Modal) auxiliary verbs	Other verbs
‘be’ + subject Are you hungry? Was it interesting? Is there any cake?	auxiliary + subject + main verb Will we finish on time? Have you had lunch? Can you swim?	‘do’ + subject + bare infinitive Did he go to the seminar? Do you like skiing? Does he work in Toulouse?

Using question words

1. When we ask a question with ‘what’, ‘which’, ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘who’, ‘whom’, ‘whose’, ‘why’ or ‘how’, the word order in the table above remains the same:

Why are you hungry?

How fast can you swim?

Where do you like skiing?

2. However, question words can refer to either an object or a subject. Note the different constructions:

Object		Subject	
Who did you see? What does Tim want? Which colour does he prefer?	**[I saw John.] [Tim wants a beer.] [He prefers blue.]**	**Who saw John? Who wants a beer? What is his favourite colour?**	**[I saw John.] [Tim wants a beer.] [Blue is his favourite colour.]**

Here are some more examples of question words asking about a subject:

What happened this morning?

How many people go to work by car?

Who arrived first?

Note that 'who' can be used to ask about either an object or subject but 'whom' is only used for objects:

Who do you want to invite?

Whom do you want to invite? [Note that although correct, this is rare.]

Who wants a drink?

Whom wants a drink?

Questions with prepositions

Most of the time, the preposition is placed at the end of the question. It sounds more natural and conversational.

Who did you give the file to?

Which city does she work in?

However, you might occasionally hear a more formal structure:

To whom did you give the file?

In which city does she work?

Other ways to ask questions

As well as the forms mentioned above, we also use these:

Type of question	Examples
Indirect questions	Do you know what time the train leaves? Could you tell me if there's a bank near here?
Negative questions	Don't you like coffee? Isn't it ready yet?
Echo questions	"I asked her to marry me?" "You did what?!" "I asked her and she said yes." "She said yes?!"
Questions with tags	You like coffee, don't you? It's ready, isn't it?

For more information, see individual rules.

Definitions

These words and expressions are related to questions:

Expression	Explanation	Examples
Closed question	It requires a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ type answer.	“Did you enjoy your trip?” “Yes, it was great, thanks.” “Shall we go to the cinema?” “No, not tonight.” “Do you like chocolate?” “Absolutely!” “Is it raining again?” “I’m afraid so.”
Open question	It asks for specific information.	How was your trip? Where is the cinema? Why do we have to work late?
Short answers	Short affirmative or negative responses used in conversation and sometimes followed by further information.	“Do you like chocolate?” “Yes, I do.” “Is it raining again?” “No it isn’t. It’s sunny today.”

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