

# Who and what: subject and object

1 Compare these examples:



Ann: **SUBJECT** *Who told you?*  
 Mary: *James told me.*

This is a subject question.



Ann: **OBJECT** *Who did you tell?*  
 Mary: *I told Bill.*

This is an object question.

2 Compare subject and object questions with who:

In the sentence *Who told you?* **Who** is the subject. Here is another example:

Ann: **SUBJECT** *Who wrote Hamlet?*  
 (= **Somebody** wrote Hamlet. Who?)  
 Mary: *Shakespeare wrote Hamlet.*

When **who** is the subject, the order of the words is the same as in a statement:

**SUBJECT**  
*Who is going to come with me?*  
*Who lives in that old house?*  
*Who wants some more coffee?*

In the sentence *Who did you tell?* **Who** is the object. Here is another example:

Ann: **OBJECT** *Who did you meet last night?*  
 (= You met **somebody**. Who?)  
 Mary: *I met a couple of friends.*

When **who** is the object, we use an auxiliary (**be, do, have, etc.**) before the subject:

**OBJECT**  
*Who are you going to invite?*  
*Who did Laura ask for help?*  
*Who have you told about this?*

3 Compare subject and object questions with what:

**SUBJECT**  
*What is in this dish?*  
 (= **Something** is in it. What?)

**OBJECT**  
*What did you buy at the shops?*  
 (= You bought **something**. What?)

## Practice

A Write questions beginning with *Who* or *What* from the sentences in brackets ( ).

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ▶ (Eric met <b>somebody</b> .)                          | <i>Who did Eric meet?</i> .....              |
| ▶ ( <b>Somebody</b> ate the last piece of cake.)        | <i>Who ate the last piece of cake?</i> ..... |
| 1 ( <b>Somebody</b> wants some more coffee.)            | .....  |
| 2 ( <b>Something</b> happened at the end of the story.) | .....  |
| 3 ( <b>Somebody</b> is going to pay the bill.)          | .....  |
| 4 (He had <b>something</b> for breakfast.)              | .....  |
| 5 (Their letter said <b>something</b> .)                | .....  |
| 6 ( <b>Somebody</b> knows the answer to my question.)   | .....  |
| 7 (They saw <b>something</b> .)                         | .....  |
| 8 (She is phoning <b>somebody</b> .)                    | .....  |

**B** Use the 'full' answers to write questions using *Who* or *What*. (We usually use the short, underlined answers when we reply to a question.)

QUESTIONS

- ▶ Who were you talking to on the phone..... ?
- ▶ What was the result of the game..... ?
- 1 ..... ?
- 2 ..... ?
- 3 ..... ?
- 4 ..... ?
- 5 ..... ?
- 6 ..... ?
- 7 ..... ?

ANSWERS

- ~ (I was talking to) Elizabeth (on the phone).
- ~ (The result of the game was) 2-0 to Italy.
- ~ Anita and Frank (went on the trip).
- ~ I'm not sure (what's happening in this film).
- ~ (I'm going to phone) Jane.
- ~ (I watched) that new comedy programme (on TV last night).
- ~ John (sent these flowers).
- ~ (I bought) a book (in that shop).
- ~ Some good news (has made Tom so happy).

**C** Read this story and then complete the questions.

Two days ago Robert took his driving test. He failed it. Afterwards he met his friend Philip. He told Philip that he had failed his test. Then he said, 'Don't tell anyone. It's a secret.' Philip said, 'OK, I won't tell anyone.' Later that day, Philip met Linda for coffee and he said, 'Robert failed his driving test.' Linda laughed. 'Poor Robert,' she said.



QUESTIONS

- ▶ (What/Robert/do/two days ago?)  
What did Robert do two days ago?.....
- 1 (What/happen?)  
.....
- 2 (Who/take/his/driving test?)  
.....
- 3 (What/Robert/fail?)  
.....
- 4 (What/Robert/say/to Philip?)  
.....
- 6 (Who/meet/Linda/for coffee?)  
.....

ANSWERS

- ~ He took his driving test.
- ~ He failed it.
- ~ Robert.
- ~ His driving test.
- ~ He said, 'Don't tell anyone.'
- ~ Philip.

**D** Complete the questions for the following answers. Use the words in brackets ( ).

- ▶ (Oswald, kill) Who did Oswald kill..... ?
- ▶ (Kennedy, kill) Who killed Kennedy..... ?
- 1 (the Nobel Prize, win) Who.....  
for Physics in 1909?
- 2 (Marconi, invent) What..... ?
- 3 (Everest, climb) Who..... with Hillary?
- 4 (Prince Charles, marry) Who..... ?
- 5 (Hiroshima, destroy) What..... ?
- 6 (Churchill, smoke) What..... ?

- ~ He killed President Kennedy.
- ~ Oswald killed Kennedy.
- ~ Marconi.
- ~ Short-wave radio.
- ~ Sherpa Tensing.
- ~ He married Diana.
- ~ An atomic bomb.
- ~ Cigars.