

QUESTIONS TAG

TAPESTRY 2

The sound of it: Understanding Intonation in Tag Questions

Question Tags

A question tag is a small question at the end of a statement.
Question tags are used when asking for agreement or confirmation.

a positive statement + a negative question tag

You are a student, aren't you?

A subject pronoun comes after an auxiliary or a form of the verb to be

a negative statement + a positive question tag

Mary isn't a teacher, is she?

A subject pronoun is used to replace the noun or noun phrase

Intonation and Meaning

The intonation of a question tag shows the exact meaning of it.
If the intonation of the question tag goes up, it means you are not sure and you want to know the answer.

John doesn't speak Spanish, does he?

If the intonation of the question tag goes down, it means you are checking / confirming information or making conversation.

John doesn't speak Spanish, does he?

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Negative Question Tags

Question tags are used when asking for agreement or confirmation.
a positive statement + a negative question tag

Positive Statement	Negative Tag
You are a student,	aren't you?
He is very busy,	isn't he?
He was happy,	wasn't he?
They were surprised,	weren't they?
You speak English,	don't you?
He studies Spanish,	doesn't he?
You studied for the test,	didn't you?
You have studied all week,	haven't you?
You had arrived before he left,	hadn't you?
You will pass the exam,	won't you?
You can speak two languages,	can't you?
You could do it for me,	couldn't you?
We must be patient,	mustn't we?
You should go now,	shouldn't you?
You would like a new job,	wouldn't you?

Negative auxiliaries and verbs in tags are usually in their contracted form (e.g. I'd)

Exceptions

I am late, aren't I?
Let's go home, shall we?

BE CAREFUL

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AUDIO:

We often begin a conversation with a sentence that includes a tag question. We add a tag to a sentence, and it becomes a question. Our voice goes up on the tag if we aren't sure about the answer; it becomes a real question. Our voice goes down on the tag if we already know the answer and are making small talk.

Examples: We haven't met before, have we? (The voice goes up – the speaker isn't sure of the answer.)

We haven't met before, have we? (The voice goes down – the speaker knows the answer.)

A.- Listen to the conversation. Where does the conversation take place? Choose the answer.

B.- Listen and repeat.

AUDIO:

Unsure of the Answer (Real Question)	Sure of the Answer (Small Talk)
1.- The food is awful, isn't? 2.- You don't see any fresh fruit, do you? 3.- There isn't any yogurt, is there? 4.- There's a lot of sugar, isn't there? 5.- You haven't seen a good health-food place, have you?	1.- The food is awful, isn't? 2.- You don't see any fresh fruit, do you? 3.- There isn't any yogurt, is there? 4.- There's a lot of sugar, isn't there? 5.- You haven't seen a good health-food place, have you?

Apply the Strategy

Pay attention to a speaker's intonation. As you've seen, intonation in a tag question carries meaning. If the voice goes up, the person is unsure of the answer and is asking a real question. If the voice goes down, the person already knows the answer and is just making a small talk. Paying attention to intonation will help you better understand a speaker's meaning.

C.- Listen to these sentences. Are the speakers unsure or sure of the answers? Choose the correct answer. You will hear each sentence twice.

AUDIO:

1.- _____

5.- _____

2.- _____

6.- _____

3.- _____

7.- _____

4.- _____

8.- _____