TAG QUESTIONS

Grammar explanation

We can add question tags like *isn't it?*, *can you?* or *didn't they?* to a statement to make it into a question. Question tags are more common in speaking than writing.

We often use question tags when we expect the listener to agree with our statement. In this case, when the statement is positive, we use a negative question tag.

She**'s** a doctor, **isn't** she?
Yesterday **was** so much fun, **wasn't** it?

If the statement is negative, we use a positive question tag.

He **isn't** here, **is** he?
The trains **are never** on time, **are** they?
Nobody has called for me, **have** they?

If we are sure or almost sure that the listener will confirm that our statement is correct, we say the question tag with a falling intonation. If we are a bit less sure, we say the question tag with a rising intonation.

Formation

If there is an auxiliary verb in the statement, we use it to form the question tag.

I **don't** need to finish this today, **do** I?
James **is** working on that, **isn't** he?
Your parents **have** retired, **haven't** they?
The phone **didn't** ring, **did** it?
It **was** raining that day, **wasn't** it?
Your mum **hadn't** met him before, **had** she?

Sometimes there is no auxiliary verb already in the statement. For example, when:

... the verb in the statement is present simple or past simple and is positive. Here we use *don't*, *doesn't* or *didn't*:

Jenni **eats** cheese, **doesn't** she?
I **said** that already, **didn't** I?

... the verb in the statement is *to be* in the present simple or past simple. In this case we use *to be* to make the question tag:

The bus stop**'s** over there, **isn't** it?
None of those customers **were** happy, **were** they?

... the verb in the statement is a modal verb. Here we use the modal verb to make the question tag:

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They **could** hear me, **couldn't** they?
You **won't** tell anyone, **will** you?

If the main verb or auxiliary verb in the statement is *am*, the positive question tag is *am I?* but the negative question tag is usually *aren't I?*:

I'm never on time, **am I**?
I'm going to get an email with the details, **aren't I**?

Do this exercise to test your grammar again.

Mixed Examples of Tag Questions

Here is a list of examples of tag questions in different contexts. Notice that some are "normal" and others seem to break all the rules:

- But you don't really love her, do you?
- This'll work, won't it?
- Oh you think so, do you?
- Well, I couldn't help it, could I?
- But you'll tell me if she calls, won't you?
- We'd never have known, would we?
- Oh you do, do you?
- The weather's bad, isn't it?
- You won't be late, will you?
- Nobody knows, do they?
- You never come on time, do you?
- You couldn't help me, could you?
- You think you're clever, do you?
- So you don't think I can do it, don't you? (British English)
- Shut up, will you!
- She can hardly love him after all that, can she?
- Nothing will happen, will it?

Now, let's check your understanding of tag questions, shall we?

FIRST EXERCISE:

1. He's still sleeping, _____

a. is not he?

b. isn't he?

c. wasn't he?

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2. You do go to school, _____

a. do you?

b. aren't you?

c. don't you?

3. Let's go for a walk, _____

a. shall we?

b. shan't we?

c. will we?

4. We won't be late, _____

a. won't we?

b. will we?

c. are we?

5. Nobody called, _____

a. do they?

b. didn't they?

c. did they?

6. They will wash the car, _____

a. will it?

b. won't they?

c. wouldn't they?

7. We must lock the doors, _____

a. mustn't they?

b. shouldn't we?

c. mustn't we?

8. I'm right, _____

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a. amn't I?

b. am not I?

c. aren't I?

9. So you bought a car, _____

a. did you?

b. haven't you?

c. weren't you?

10. You wouldn't like to invite my Dad, _____

a. did you?

b. would you?

c. won't you?

SECOND EXERCISE:

Complete the sentences with the correct question tags.

1. Mr McGuinness is from Ireland, _____?
2. The car isn't in the garage,_____ ?
3. You are John, _____ ?
4. She went to the library yesterday, _____?
5. He didn't recognize me, _____?
6. Cars pollute the environment, _____?
7. Mr. Pritchard has been to Scotland recently, _____ ?
8. The trip is very expensive, _____?
9. He won't tell her, _____?
10. Hugh had a red car, _____?

Now you can wrirte your own tag questions (10) and answers them.

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