# Tag Questions question-tag.jpg

### What is a tag question?

A tag question is a short question added to the end of a positive or negative statement.

|  |
| --- |
| **You speak English, *don't you*?** |

A tag question is a special construction in English. It is a statement followed by a mini-question. The whole sentence is a "tag question", and the mini-question at the end is called a "question tag".

A "tag" is something small that we add to something larger. For example, the little piece of cloth added to a shirt showing size or washing instructions is a tag.

We use tag questions at the end of statements to ask for confirmation. They mean something like: "Am I right?" or "Do you agree?" They are very common in English.

The basic structure is:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **+** Positive statement, | **-** negative tag? |
| Snow is white, | isn't it? |
| **-** Negative statement, | **+** positive tag? |
| You don't like me, | do you? |

Look at these examples with positive statements:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **positive statement [+]** | | | | **negative tag [-]** | | | *notes:* |
| subject | auxiliary | main verb |  | auxiliary | not | personal pronoun (same as subject) |  |
| You | are | coming, |  | are | n't | you? |  |
| We | have | finished, |  | have | n't | we? |  |
| You | do | like | coffee, | do | n't | you? |  |
| You |  | like | coffee, | do | n't | you? | You (do) like... |
| They | will | help, |  | wo | n't | they? | won't = will not |
| I | can | come, |  | can | 't | I? |  |
| We | must | go, |  | must | n't | we? |  |
| He | should | try | harder, | should | n't | he? |  |
| You |  | are | English, | are | n't | you? | no auxiliary for main verb **be** present & past |
| John |  | was | there, | was | n't | he? |

Look at these examples with negative statements:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **negative statement [-]** | | | | | | **positive tag [+]** | |
| subject | auxiliary |  | main verb |  |  | auxiliary | personal pronoun (same as subject) |
| It | is | n't | raining, |  |  | is | it? |
| We | have | never | seen |  | that, | have | we? |
| You | do | n't | like |  | coffee, | do | you? |
| They | will | not | help, |  |  | will | they? |
| They | wo | n't | report |  | us, | will | they? |
| I | can | never | do |  | it right, | can | I? |
| We | must | n't | tell |  | her, | must | we? |
| He | should | n't | drive |  | so fast, | should | he? |
| You |  |  | are | n't | English, | are | you? |
| John |  |  | was | not | there, | was | he? |

Some special cases:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| I **am** right, **are**n't I? | aren't I (*not* amn't I) |
| You **have** to go, **do**n't you? | you (do) have to go... |
| I **have been** answering, **have**n't I? | use first auxiliary |
| **Nothing** came in the post, **did** it? | treat statements with nothing, nobody etc like negative statements |
| **Let's** go, shall we? | let's = let us |
| He**'d** better do it, **had**n't he? | he had better (no auxiliary) |

Here are some mixed examples:

* But you don't really love her, do you?
* This will work, won't it?
* 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?
* The weather's bad, isn't it?
* You won't be late, will you?
* Nobody knows, do they?

Notice that we often use tag questions to ask for information or help, starting with a negative statement. This is quite a friendly/polite way of making a request. For example, instead of saying "Where is the police station?" (not very polite), or "Do you know where the police station is?" (slightly more polite), we could say: "You wouldn't know where the police station is, would you?" Here are some more examples:

* You don't know of any good jobs, do you?
* You couldn't help me with my homework, could you?
* You haven't got $10 to lend me, have you?

**Intonation**

We can change the meaning of a tag question with the musical pitch of our voice. With rising intonation, it sounds like a real question. But if our intonation falls, it sounds more like a statement that doesn't require a real answer:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | intonation | |  |
| You don't know where my wallet is, | do you? | / rising | real question |
| It's a beautiful view, | isn't it? | \ falling | not a real question |

**Answers to tag questions**

A **question tag** is the "mini-question" at the end. A **tag question** is the whole sentence.

How do we answer a tag question? Often, we just say Yes or No. Sometimes we may repeat the tag and reverse it (..., do they? Yes, they do). Be very careful about answering tag questions. In some languages, an oposite system of answering is used, and non-native English speakers sometimes answer in the wrong way. This can lead to a lot of confusion!

Answer a tag question according to the **truth** of the situation. Your answer reflects the real facts, not (necessarily) the question.

For example, everyone knows that snow is white. Look at these questions, and the correct answers:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| tag question | correct answer |  |  |
| Snow is white, isn't it? | Yes (it is). | the answer is the same in both cases - because snow IS WHITE! | but notice the change of stress when the answerer does not agree with the questioner |
| Snow isn't white, is it? | **Yes** it**is**! |
| Snow is black, isn't it? | **No** it**isn't**! | the answer is the same in both cases - because snow IS NOT BLACK! |
| Snow isn't black, is it? | No (it isn't). |

In some languages, people answer a question like "Snow isn't black, is it?" with "Yes" (meaning "Yes, I agree with you"). This is the **wrong answer** in English!

Here are some more examples, with correct answers:

* The moon goes round the earth, doesn't it? Yes, it does.
* The earth is bigger than the moon, isn't it? Yes.
* The earth is bigger than the sun, isn't it? **No**, it **isn't**!
* Asian people don't like rice, do they? **Yes**, they **do**!
* Elephants live in Europe, don't they? **No**, they **don't**!
* Men don't have babies, do they? No.
* The English alphabet doesn't have 40 letters, does it? **No**, it **doesn't**.

**Question tags with imperatives**

Sometimes we use question tags with imperatives (invitations, orders), but the sentence remains an imperative and does not require a direct answer. We use *won't* for invitations. We use *can, can't, will, would* for orders.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | imperative + question tag | *notes:* |
| invitation | Take a seat, won't you? | polite |
| order | Help me, can you? | quite friendly |
| Help me, can't you? | quite friendly (some irritation?) |
| Close the door, would you? | quite polite |
| Do it now, will you? | less polite |
| Don't forget, will you? | with negative imperatives only *will* is possible |

**Same-way question tags**

Although the basic structure of tag questions is positive-negative or negative-positive, it is sometime possible to use a positive-positive or negative-negative structure. We use same-way question tags to express interest, surprise, anger etc, and not to make real questions.

* So you're having a baby, are you? That's wonderful!
* She wants to marry him, does she? Some chance!
* So you think that's amusing, do you? Think again.

Negative-negative tag questions usually sound rather hostile:

* So you don't like my looks, don't you?

**( adopted from English.club.com)**