

Tag Questions (do you? / isn't it?, etc.)

A

Study these examples:

You haven't seen Maria today, have you?



No, I haven't.

It was a good movie, wasn't it? Yes, I loved it.



Have you? and wasn't it? are *tag questions* (= mini-questions that we often put at the end of a sentence in spoken English). In tag questions, we use an *auxiliary verb* (have/was/will, etc.). We use do/does/did for the *simple present* and *past* (see also Unit 48):

- "Lauren plays the piano, doesn't she?" "Well, yes, but not very well."
- "You didn't lock the door, did you?" "No, I forgot."

B

Normally we use a *negative* tag question after a *positive* sentence:

positive sentence + negative tag

Maria will be here soon, won't she?
There was a lot of traffic, wasn't there?
Jim should take his medicine, shouldn't he?

... and a *positive* tag question after a *negative* sentence:

negative sentence + positive tag

Maria won't be late, will she?
They don't like us, do they?
You haven't paid the gas bill, have you?

Notice the meaning of yes and no in answer to a negative sentence:

- You're not going out today, are you? { Yes. (= Yes, I am going out.)
No. (= No, I am not going out.)

C

The meaning of a tag question depends on how you say it. If your voice goes down, you aren't really asking a question; you are only inviting the listener to agree with you:

- "It's a nice day, isn't it?" "Yes, beautiful."
- "Eric doesn't look too good today, does he?" "No, he looks very tired."
- She's very funny. She has a wonderful sense of humor, doesn't she?

But if the voice goes up, it is a real question:

- "You haven't seen Lisa today, have you?" "No, I haven't."
(= Have you seen Lisa today by any chance?)

We often use a negative sentence + positive tag to ask for things or information or to ask somebody to do something. The voice goes up at the end of the tag in sentences like these:

- "You wouldn't have a pen, would you?" "Yes, here you are."
- "You couldn't lend me some money, could you?" "It depends how much."
- "You don't know where Lauren is, do you?" "Sorry, I have no idea."

D

After Let's . . . the question tag is shall we?:

- Let's go for a walk, shall we?

After the imperative (Do . . . / Listen . . . / Give . . . , etc.), the tag is usually will you?:

- Open the door, will you?

Note that we say aren't I? (= am I not?):

- I'm late, aren't I?

Exercises

49.1 Put a tag question at the end of these sentences.

- | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------|
| 1. | Tom won't be late, | <u>will he</u> | ? | No, he's never late. |
| 2. | You're tired, | <u>aren't you</u> | ? | Yes, a little. |
| 3. | Tracy has lived here a long time, | _____ | ? | Yes, 20 years. |
| 4. | You weren't listening, | _____ | ? | Yes, I was! |
| 5. | Sue doesn't know Ann, | _____ | ? | No, they've never met. |
| 6. | Jack's on vacation, | _____ | ? | Yes, he's in Puerto Rico. |
| 7. | Mike hasn't phoned today, | _____ | ? | No, I don't think so. |
| 8. | You can speak Spanish, | _____ | ? | Yes, but not fluently. |
| 9. | He won't mind if I use his phone, | _____ | ? | No, of course he won't. |
| 10. | There are a lot of people here, | _____ | ? | Yes, more than I expected. |
| 11. | Let's go out tonight, | _____ | ? | Yes, that would be great. |
| 12. | This isn't very interesting, | _____ | ? | No, not very. |
| 13. | I'm too impatient, | _____ | ? | Yes, you are sometimes. |
| 14. | You wouldn't tell anyone, | _____ | ? | No, of course not. |
| 15. | Listen, | _____ | ? | OK, I'm listening. |
| 16. | I shouldn't have lost my temper, | _____ | ? | No, but that's all right. |
| 17. | He'd never met her before, | _____ | ? | No, that was the first time. |

49.2 Read the situation and write a sentence with a tag question. In each situation you are asking your friend to agree with you.

- You look out of the window. The sky is blue and the sun is shining. What do you say to your friend? (beautiful day) It's a beautiful day, isn't it?
- You're with a friend outside a restaurant. You're looking at the prices, which are very high. What do you say? (expensive) It _____?
- You've just come out of a movie theater with a friend. You really enjoyed the movie. What do you say to your friend? (great) The movie _____?
- You and a friend are listening to a woman singing. You like her voice very much. What do you say to your friend? (a beautiful voice)
She _____?
- You are trying on a jacket. You look in the mirror and you don't like what you see. What do you say to your friend? (not / look / very good)
It _____?
- Your friend's hair is much shorter than when you last met. What do you say? (have / your hair / cut) You _____?
- You and a friend are walking over a wooden bridge. It is very old, and some parts are broken. What do you say? (not / very safe)
This bridge _____?

49.3 In these situations you are asking for information and asking people to do things.

- You need a pen. Perhaps Kelly has one. Ask her. Kelly, you don't have a pen, do you?
- The cashier is putting your groceries in a plastic bag, but perhaps he could give you a paper bag. Ask him. _____
- You're looking for Ann. Perhaps Kate knows where she is. Ask her.
Kate, you _____?
- You need a bicycle pump. Perhaps Nicole has one. Ask her.
Nicole, _____?
- You're looking for your keys. Perhaps Robert has seen them. Ask him.
