

Tag Questions

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Grammar Notes

A. Use

When you are sure that someone will agree with what you are saying, use tag questions for **emphasis** or **confirmation**.

- That was a great restaurant, **wasn't it?**
- The meeting starts at 9:00, **doesn't it?**

B. Form

There are a few basic guidelines for forming a tag question in English.

#	Rules	Examples
1	The tag is always V-S (verb-subject), the opposite order of the main sentence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is a student, isn't he? S V O V S
2	Use the same subject in the tag as in the main sentence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They speak English fluently, don't they?
3	If the main subject is a noun, the tag subject changes to a pronoun.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That book was good, wasn't it?
4	The tag verb is always the opposite (positive/negative) of the main verb.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This food looks delicious, doesn't it? • The cheese didn't taste good, did it?
5	If the main verb is the <i>Be</i> verb, the tag verb is the opposite (positive/negative) <i>Be</i> verb.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are happy, aren't they? • You weren't in class yesterday, were you?
6	If the main verb doesn't have an auxiliary (helping verb), the tag verb is <i>don't</i> or <i>didn't</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You like pizza, don't you? • My sister finished her homework, didn't she?
7	If the main verb has an auxiliary, the tag verb takes the opposite (positive/negative) auxiliary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You haven't heard back from them, have you? • He isn't coming tonight, is he?
8	If the main verb has a modal, the tag verb takes the opposite (positive/negative) modal form.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your friend can ski, can't she? • We should study tonight, shouldn't we?
9	If the main verb has a modal expression (<i>have to</i> , <i>have got to</i> , <i>be able to</i> , <i>ought to</i> , <i>had better</i> , etc.), the tag verb follow the rules in 5 and 6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This meeting has to end soon, doesn't it? • All the children are able to swim, aren't they?

Grammar Notes cont.

C. Responses

Responding to tag questions can be tricky. It depends on whether the person **agrees** with you (confirms what you expected) or **disagrees** with you (says the opposite of what you expected).

	Agreeing	Disagreeing
Rule	When someone asks you a tag question that you agree with, respond using the same form (positive/negative) as the main verb, not the tag.	When someone asks you a tag question that you disagree with, respond using the opposite form (positive/negative) of the main verb. Note that it's more polite to respond with "Actually, ..." and give a short explanation.
Examples	<p>A: You are going to the dinner tonight, aren't you?</p> <p>B: Yes, I am. <i>(Yes, I am going. I agree.)</i></p>	<p>A: You are going to the dinner tonight, aren't you?</p> <p>B: No, I'm not. <i>(No, I am not going. I disagree.)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Actually, I can't make it. I have to babysit tonight. <i>(polite disagreement)</i></p>
	<p>A: This store doesn't open before 10:00, does it?</p> <p>B: No, it doesn't. <i>(No, it doesn't open before 10:00. I agree.)</i></p>	<p>A: This store doesn't open before 10:00, does it?</p> <p>B: Yes, it does. It opens at 9:00. <i>(Yes, it does open before 10:00. I disagree.)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Actually, it opens at 9:00. <i>(polite disagreement)</i></p>

Grammar Notes cont.



D. Notes

Rising Intonation

VOICE GOES UP DURING THE TAG

Use rising intonation to show that you're about **80–90% sure** that someone will agree with you.

Note that rising intonation for tag questions is more common than falling intonation.

- This book had a good ending,  **didn't it?**
- The meeting won't go on too long,  **will it?**

Other Types of Tags

Other common words or phrases have the same meaning as tag questions (used for confirmation or emphasis). Some common expressions are *right*, *don't you think*, and *eh*. Note that intonation is usually **rising** for these tags.



Also note that *eh* is mainly used in speaking, not writing. It is common in a few countries such as Canada and New Zealand. Intonation can be **rising** or **falling**.

- That was a great movie, **right?**
- That was a great movie, **don't you think?**
- That was a great movie, **eh?**

Falling Intonation

VOICE GOES DOWN DURING THE TAG

Use falling intonation to show that you're about **95% sure** that someone will agree with you.

- That was a great movie,  **wasn't it?**
- It's a beautiful sunset,  **isn't it?**

Modals Not Used in Tags

Be careful! *Might* and *may* are not used in tag questions, and *must* is also awkward. Don't form tags using these modals. Use other types of tags instead, such as *right* or *don't you think*.

- ✘ You might go out tonight, **mightn't you?**
- ✓ You might go out tonight, **right?**

Exercise 3

LISTENING

Listen to the recording. Put a check mark (✓) in the correct box.

#	Rising Intonation ↑	Falling Intonation ↓
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

Exercise 4

WRITING

Unscramble the sentences. Then write a tag question for each one.

Ex. reads / your / books / many / sister

Your sister reads many books, doesn't she?

1. friends / love / your / pizza

2. try / you / didn't / very / hard

3. is / she / soon / going / away

4. book / wasn't / interesting / very / this

5. Sarah / tennis / can't / play

6. hiking / we / going / go / to / are

7. taking / now / they / a / are / test

8. won't / you / long / be

9. pasta / the / delicious / was

10. have / leave / at / 6:00 / you / to

Exercise 5

CLASS SURVEY

Use the prompts to make tag questions. Try to use traditional tags as well as *right, don't you think*, etc. If a classmate agrees with your question, write their name in the column. Talk to as many of your classmates as you can.

#	Find someone who...	Name
1	doesn't like Mondays.	
2	cares about the environment.	
3	doesn't play a musical instrument.	
4	has never met a celebrity.	
5	will do his/her homework tonight.	
6	studied last weekend.	
7	usually eats healthy food.	
8	loves Fridays.	
9	won't buy a lottery ticket this week.	
10	didn't sleep in this morning.	

Example 1:

A: You don't like Mondays, do you?

B: No, I don't. I'm always tired on Mondays.

A: Thanks. *[writes down B's name]*

Example 2:

A: You don't like Mondays, do you?

B: Actually, I do. I look forward to starting a new week.

A: Okay, thank you.
[doesn't write down B's name and asks someone else]

Exercise 6

QUIZ

Write a tag question based on each situation below.

Ex. You liked the movie you saw with your friend.

That was a great movie, wasn't it?

1. You like the TV show you are watching with your friend right now.

2. You didn't like the restaurant that you and your date went to.

3. You want to make sure your friend is coming over tonight.

4. You want to confirm the start time of the baseball game.

5. You think that your daughter should study for her test.

6. You don't think your son should play video games all the time.

7. You want to tell your book club you enjoyed the book.

8. You want to show your kids that you love their grandmother's cooking.

9. You want to check that your roommate is buying milk today.

10. You want to make sure your teacher will give back the assignments tomorrow.

Answer Key

Exercise 1

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. don't they | 6. is she | 11. wasn't it |
| 2. aren't we | 7. doesn't she | 12. don't you |
| 3. does he | 8. was it | 13. doesn't it |
| 4. didn't he | 9. don't they | 14. did you |
| 5. doesn't it | 10. doesn't he | 15. isn't it |

Exercise 2

- | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. have they | 6. wasn't it | 11. wasn't he |
| 2. won't you | 7. will they | 12. won't it |
| 3. can't he | 8. doesn't she | 13. hasn't it |
| 4. are they | 9. should we | 14. wasn't it |
| 5. do you | 10. aren't they | 15. do we |

Exercise 3

Transcript and answers:

- The concert starts at 7:00, doesn't it? **(rising)**
- This movie isn't very funny, is it? **(falling)**
- Michael will be late again, won't he? **(falling)**
- You should really try harder, shouldn't you? **(falling)**
- You didn't buy that expensive dress, did you? **(rising)**
- They're not coming over tonight, are they? **(falling)**
- This painting is beautiful, isn't it? **(rising)**
- You haven't had a chance to read it yet, have you? **(rising)**
- You forgot my birthday again, didn't you? **(falling)**
- We can still get together on Saturday, can't we? **(rising)**

Exercise 4

- Your friends love pizza, don't they?
- You didn't try very hard, did you?
- She is going away soon, isn't she?
- This book wasn't very interesting, was it?
- Sarah can't play tennis, can she?
- We are going to go hiking, aren't we?
- They are taking a test now, aren't they?
- You won't be long, will you?
- The pasta was delicious, wasn't it?
- You have to leave at 6:00, don't you?

Exercise 5

Answers will vary.

Monitor your students for correct tag question formation.

Exercise 6

Answers may vary.

- This is a good show, isn't it?
- That restaurant had terrible service, didn't it?
- You're coming over later, aren't you?
- The game starts at 7:00 pm, doesn't it?
- You should study more for your test, shouldn't you?
- You shouldn't play video games so often, should you?
- That was a really good book, wasn't it?
- Your grandmother makes the best food, doesn't she?
- You're picking up milk on your way home today, aren't you?
- You'll give us our assignments back tomorrow, won't you?