

## Forming Questions for English Language Learners

The normal word order for statements in English is *subject + verb + the rest of the sentence*. In questions, this word order is often inverted (reversed) and changed in other ways. This tip sheet shows three common ways to form questions.

### With "be" verbs

In statements using "be" verbs we usually place the subject before the verb:

*Melissa is excited about graduating.*

*Julio's cousin is Martin.*

*He was glad to find a job so soon.*

However, in questions, we place the verb first:

#### Questions using "be"

Pattern→	Wh- word	"Be" verb	Subject	(the rest of the sentence)?
	<i>Why</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>Melissa</i>	<i>excited?</i>
	<i>Who</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>Julio's cousin?</i>	
	<i>Why</i>	<i>was</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>glad?</i>
Pattern→		"Be" verb	Subject	(the rest of the sentence)?
		<i>Is</i>	<i>Melissa</i>	<i>excited about graduating?</i>
		<i>Is</i>	<i>Julio's cousin</i>	<i>Martin?</i>
		<i>Was</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>glad to find a job?</i>

### With helping verbs

Many verb tenses require helping verbs. In positive statements, the helping verb comes just before the main verb: *is reading*. In negative statements, the helping verb and main verb are split apart: *is not reading*.

*Melissa is planning a trip to Costa Rica.*

*Martin has been calling Julio all day.*

*They had not completed all the requirements.*

In the following questions, the *first* helping verb is separated from the main verb. In negative questions, the *not* goes right after the first helping verb.

#### Questions using helping verbs

Pattern→	Wh- word	Helping verb	Subject	Main verb	(the rest of the sentence)?
	<i>When</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>Melissa</i>	<i>planning</i>	<i>a trip to Costa Rica?</i>
	<i>What</i>	<i>has</i>	<i>Martin</i>	<i>been calling</i>	<i>Julio about?</i>
	<i>Why</i>	<i>hadn't</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>completed</i>	<i>all the requirements?</i>
Pattern→		Helping verb	Subject	Main verb	(the rest of the sentence)
		<i>Is</i>	<i>Melissa</i>	<i>planning</i>	<i>a trip to Costa Rica?</i>
		<i>Has</i>	<i>Martin</i>	<i>been calling</i>	<i>Julio?</i>
		<i>Hadn't</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>completed</i>	<i>all the requirements?</i>

### With "do" in simple present or simple past tense

When you use simple present and simple past verb tenses to make positive statements, you do not use helping verbs.

*Melissa plans to go to Costa Rica.*  
*Julio missed all Martin's calls.*  
*They want to take the bus to town.*

However, when you make questions in simple present or simple past, you must add a helper, *do*, *does*, or *did*, and change the main verb to its base form. Thus, *plans* becomes *does plan*, *missed* becomes *did miss*, and *want* becomes *do want*.

### Questions using simple present or simple past tense

Pattern→	Wh-word	Helping verb: do, does, did	Subject	Main verb	(the rest of the sentence)?
	<i>When</i>	<i>does</i>	<i>Melissa</i>	<i>plan</i>	<i>to go to Costa Rica?</i>
	<i>Why</i>	<i>did</i>	<i>Julio</i>	<i>miss</i>	<i>all Martin's calls?</i>
	<i>When</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>want</i>	<i>to take the bus to town?</i>
Pattern→		Helping verb: do, does, did	Subject	Main verb	(the rest of the sentence)?
		<i>Does</i>	<i>Melissa</i>	<i>plan</i>	<i>to go to Costa Rica?</i>
		<i>Did</i>	<i>Julio</i>	<i>miss</i>	<i>all his calls?</i>
		<i>Do</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>want</i>	<i>to take the bus?</i>

### Forms of "be"

Singular Present Tense		Plural Present Tense	
1 <sup>st</sup> person (I)	<i>am</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person (we)	<i>are</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> person (you)	<i>are</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person (you)	<i>are</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> person (he, she, it)	<i>is</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person (they)	<i>are</i>
Past Tense			
1 <sup>st</sup> person (I)	<i>was</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person (we)	<i>were</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> person (you)	<i>were</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person (you)	<i>were</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> person (he, she, it)	<i>was</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person (they)	<i>were</i>
Perfect Tenses (present/past)			
1 <sup>st</sup> person (I)	<i>have/had been</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person (we)	<i>have/had been</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> person (you)	<i>have/had been</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person (you)	<i>have/had been</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> person (he, she, it)	<i>has/had been</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person (they)	<i>have/had been</i>

### Forms of "do"

Singular Present Tense		Plural Present Tense	
1 <sup>st</sup> person (I)	<i>do</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person (we)	<i>do</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> person (you)	<i>do</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person (you)	<i>do</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> person (he, she, it)	<i>does</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person (they)	<i>do</i>
Past Tense			
1 <sup>st</sup> person (I)	<i>did</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person (we)	<i>did</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> person (you)	<i>did</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person (you)	<i>did</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> person (he, she, it)	<i>did</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person (they)	<i>did</i>

*Contributed by Rosemary McKeever*



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