



## 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 (or the wh- word if we are using one):

#### Questions using "be"

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

### With helping verbs

Many verb tenses require helping (auxiliary) 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 negative questions, *not* follows the helping verb.

#### Questions using helping verbs

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

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

We do not use helping verbs to make positive statements using simple present and simple past verbs:

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

However, for questions in simple present or simple past, we must add a helper, *do*, *does*, or *did* with the base form of the main verb. Thus, *want* becomes *do want*, *plans* becomes *does plan*, and *missed* becomes *did miss*.

#### Questions using simple present or simple past tense

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

#### Forms of "be"

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

#### Forms of "do"

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

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