

Question Tags and Responses: Checking Information

INTERMEDIATE

Focus: Auxiliary verbs, Do/does/did balance, Polarity rules, and Responding to negative statements

In English, we use **Question Tags** to check if information is true or to ask for agreement. We add a mini-question at the end of a sentence.

1. The Golden Rule of Polarity (Balance)

The "tag" usually has the **opposite** meaning (polarity) of the main sentence.

Main Sentence	Tag	Example
Positive (+)	Negative (-)	You are a student, aren't you?
Negative (-)	Positive (+)	You aren't a teacher, are you?

2. Choosing the Right Auxiliary Verb

The verb in the tag must match the grammar of the main sentence.

A. Sentences with Auxiliary Verbs (Be, Have, Modals)

If the main sentence uses *is, are, was, were, have, has*, or modals like *can, will, should*, repeat that word in the tag.

- *She **is** coming tomorrow, **isn't** she?*
- *They **haven't** finished, **have** they?*
- *You **can** swim, **can't** you?*

B. Sentences with Simple Verbs (Present & Past Simple)

If there is no auxiliary verb in the main sentence (just a main verb like *play, work, went*), you must use **do / does / did**.

- **Present Simple:** *You **live** here, **don't** you?* (Positive → Don't)
- **Present Simple (3rd Person):** *She **likes** pizza, **doesn't** she?* (Positive → Doesn't)
- **Past Simple:** *He **bought** a car, **didn't** he?* (Positive → Didn't)

C. The Exception: "I am"

- *I **am** late, **aren't** I?* (We do NOT say "amn't I").

3. Responding to Negative Questions

Responding to negative tags (e.g., "*You **don't** like coffee, do you?*") can be confusing.

In English, **Yes** and **No** refer to the **facts**, not the grammar of the question.

- **YES** = The positive fact is true. (Use affirmative verb).
- **NO** = The negative fact is true. (Use negative verb).

Example: *You **aren't** hungry, are you?*

- **Fact:** My stomach is full. → "**No, I'm not.**" (Meaning: "You are correct, I am not hungry.")
- **Fact:** I want to eat. → "**Yes, I am!**" (Meaning: "Actually, you are wrong, I AM hungry.")

Practice Exercises

Part 1: Forming Question Tags

Instruction: Complete the sentences by adding the correct question tag. Pay attention to the auxiliary verbs and the use of *do/does/did*.

1. She is your sister, _____ ?
2. You don't eat meat, _____ ?
3. They went to London last year, _____ ?
4. John has passed the exam, _____ ?
5. You can drive a car, _____ ?
6. We aren't late for the movie, _____ ?
7. Your parents live in New York, _____ ?
8. He didn't call you yesterday, _____ ?
9. It looks like rain, _____ ?
10. I am on the list, _____ ?

Part 2: Responding to Negative Statements

Instruction: Read the negative statement/question and the "Truth" (the fact). Choose the correct response (**Yes** or **No**) and complete the short answer to avoid ambiguity.

Example:

- *Question:* "You aren't tired, are you?"
- *Truth:* I have lots of energy.
- *Answer:* **No**, I'm not.

11. **Question:** "You didn't enjoy the movie, did you?"

- **Truth:** It was boring.
- **Answer:** _____ , I didn't.

12. **Question:** "She hasn't met him before, has she?"

- **Truth:** They are strangers.
- **Answer:** _____ , she hasn't.

13. **Question:** "You don't smoke, do you?"

- **Truth:** I smoke one pack a day.
- **Answer:** _____ , I do!

14. **Question:** "He isn't coming to the party, is he?"

- **Truth:** He is staying home.
- **Answer:** _____ , he isn't.

15. **Question:** "We can't park here, can we?"

- **Truth:** Parking is allowed.
- **Answer:** _____ , we can!

Answer Key

Part 1: Forming Question Tags

1. isn't she
2. do you
3. didn't they (Past Simple uses 'did')
4. hasn't he
5. can't you
6. are we
7. don't they (Present Simple uses 'do')
8. did he
9. doesn't it (Present Simple 3rd person uses 'does')
10. aren't I (Exception form)

Part 2: Responding to Negative Statements

11. **No** (Confirming the negative: I didn't enjoy it.)
12. **No** (Confirming the negative: She hasn't met him.)
13. **Yes** (Contradicting the negative: Actually, I do smoke.)
14. **No** (Confirming the negative: He isn't coming.)
15. **Yes** (Contradicting the negative: Actually, we can park here.)