Question Tags Rules

Question tags are short questions at the end of statements.

They are mainly used in speech when we want to:

- **confirm that something is true or not**, or
- **to encourage a reply** from the person we are speaking to.

Question tags are formed with the auxiliary or modal verb from the statement and the appropriate subject.

A **positive** statement is followed by a **negative** question tag.

- Jack **is** from Spain, **isn't** he?
- Mary **can** speak English, **can't** she?

A **negative** statement is followed by a **positive** question tag.

- They **aren't** funny, **are** they?
- He **shouldn't** say things like that, **should** he?

When the verb in the main sentence is in the *present simple* we form the question tag with **do / does**.

- You *play* the guitar, **don't** you?
- Alison *likes* tennis, **doesn't** she?

If the verb is in the *past simple* we use **did**.

- They *went* to the cinema, **didn't** they?
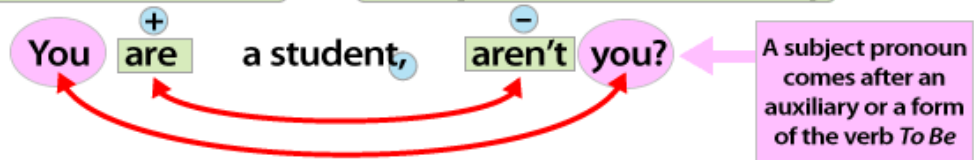- She *studied* in New Zealand, **didn't** she?

When the statement contains a word with a **negative** meaning, the question tag needs to be **positive**

- He **hardly ever** speaks, **does** he?
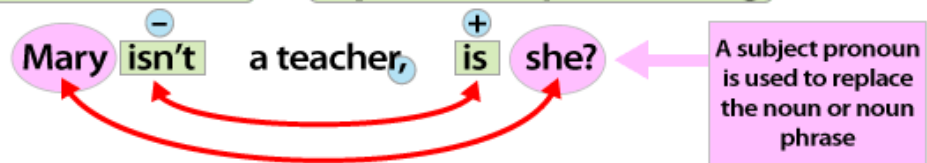- They **rarely** eat in restaurants, **do** they?

Question Tags Summary Charts

A question tag is a small question at the end of a statement.
Question tags are used when asking for agreement or confirmation.

a **positive** statement + a **negative** question tag

⊕
You are a student, aren't you? ← A subject pronoun comes after an auxiliary or a form of the verb *To Be*

a **negative** statement + a **positive** question tag

⊖ ⊕
Mary isn't a teacher, is she? ← A subject pronoun is used to replace the noun or noun phrase

Intonation and Meaning

The intonation of a question tag shows the exact meaning of it.

If the intonation of the question tag goes **up**, it means you are not sure and you want to know the answer.

John doesn't speak Spanish, does he?

If the intonation of the question tag goes **down**, it means you are checking / confirming information or making conversation.

John doesn't speak Spanish, does he?

Positive Question Tags

Question tags are used when asking for agreement or confirmation.

a **negative** statement + a **positive** question tag

Negative Statement | Positive Tag

You	aren't	a teacher,	are you?
He	isn't	crazy,	is he?
He	wasn't	relaxed,	was he?
They	weren't	late,	were they?
You	don't speak	French,	do you?
You	didn't study	for the test,	did you?
You	haven't been	here all week,	have you?
You	hadn't done	it before then,	had you?
You	won't fail	the exam,	will you?
You	can't drive	a car,	can you?
You	couldn't do	it for me,	could you?
We	mustn't say	anything,	must we?
You	shouldn't be	so busy,	should you?
You	wouldn't stop	me,	would you?

Statements using *barely, hardly, neither, no, nobody, none, nothing* and *seldom* are treated as negative statements.

Nobody	went	to the meeting,	did they?
Nothing	is	ready,	is it?

Negative Question Tags

Question tags are used when asking for agreement or confirmation.
a **positive** statement + a **negative** question tag

Positive Statement

You	are	a student,
He	is	very busy,
He	was	happy,
They	were	surprised,

You	speak	English,
He	studies	Spanish,
You	studied	for the test,

You	have studied	all week,
You	had arrived	before he left,
You	will pass	the exam,
You	can speak	two languages,
You	could do	it for me,
We	must be	patient,
You	should go	now,
You	would like	a new job,

Negative Tag

aren't	you?
isn't	he?
wasn't	he?
weren't	they?

don't	you?
doesn't	he?
didn't	you?

haven't	you?
hadn't	you?
won't	you?
can't	you?
couldn't	you?
mustn't	we?
shouldn't	you?
wouldn't	you?

> Negative auxiliaries and verbs in tags are usually in their contracted form (= n't)

Exceptions

I	am	late,	aren't	I?
	Let's go	home,	shall	we?

> BE CAREFUL

Exceptions

Some verbs / expressions have different question tags. For example:

I am - I am attractive, **aren't** I?

Positive imperative - Stop daydreaming, **will / won't** you?

Negative imperative - Don't stop singing, **will** you?

Let's - Let's go to the beach, **shall** we?

Have got (possession) - He has got a car, **hasn't** he?

There is / are - There aren't any spiders in the bedroom, **are there**?

This / that is - This is Paul's pen, **isn't it**?

Intonation

When we are sure of the answer and we are simply encouraging a response, the intonation in the question tag goes down:

- This is your car, **isn't it**?
  (Your voice goes down when you say isn't it.)

When we are not sure and want to check information, the intonation in the question tag goes up:

- He is from France, **isn't he**?
  (Your voice goes up when you say isn't he.)