

UNIT 51. Question tags (do you? isn't it? etc.)

A. Study these examples:

You haven't seen Mary today, **have you?** No, I'm afraid not.

It was a good film, **wasn't it?** Yes. I really enjoyed it.

Have you? and wasn't it? are **question tags** (= **mini-questions** that we often put on the end of a sentence in spoken English).

In question tags, we use an auxiliary verb (**have/was/will** etc.). We use do/does/did for **the present and past simple**

* 'Karen plays the piano, **doesn't she?**' 'Well, yes, but not very well.'

* 'You didn't lock the door, **did you?**' 'No, I forgot.'

B. Normally we use a negative question tag after a positive sentence: **positive** sentence + **negative tag**

Mary will be here soon, **won't she?**

There was a lot of traffic, **wasn't there?**

Jim should pass the exam, **shouldn't he?**

... A positive question tag is used after a negative sentence: **negative sentence** + **positive tag**

Mary won't be late, **will she?**

They don't like us, **do they?**

You haven't got a car, **have you?**

Notice the meaning of yes and no in answer to a negative sentence:

* You're not going out today, **are you?** Yes. (Yes, I am going out)

* You're not going out today, are you? No. (No, I am not going out)

C. The meaning of a question tag depends on how you say it. If your voice **goes down**, you **aren't really asking a question**; you are only inviting the listener to agree with you:

* 'It's a nice day, isn't it?' 'Yes, lovely.'

* 'Tim doesn't look well today, does he?' 'No, he looks very tired.'

* 'She's very pretty. She's got beautiful eyes, hasn't she?'

But if the voice **goes up**, it is **a real question**: * 'You haven't seen Mary today, have you?' 'No, I'm afraid not.' (= Have you seen Mary today by any chance?)

We often use a negative sentence + positive tag to **ask for things or information**, or **to ask somebody to do something**. The voice goes up at the end of the tag in sentences like these:

* 'You haven't got a pen, have you?' 'Yes, here you are.'

* 'You couldn't do me a favour, could you?' 'It depends what it is.'

* 'You don't know where Karen is, do you?' 'Sorry, I've no idea.'

D. After **Let's...** the question tag is ... shall we?: Let's go for a walk, shall we?

After the imperative (Do.../Don't do... etc.), the tag is usually ... will you?:

Open the door, will you? Don't be late, will you?

Note that we say ... aren't I? (= am I not?): I'm late, aren't I?