

## QUESTION WORDS AND QUESTIONS

For obvious reasons, it is important to be able to ask questions correctly. For example, if you ask 'how are your parents?' when you *mean* to ask 'what do your parents look like?' or 'what are your parents like?', the answer may not be what you want to know.

Again, a typical error is to say 'how many time?\*' instead of 'how long?' The first problem here is that the question is not grammatical; the second problem is that it is very close to the correct, but different, question 'how many times?' Then there is the almost correct – but still wrong – 'how long **time**'?

Also, remember that questions often require you to use a correct auxiliary verb in the correct verb tense.

Finally, it is important to understand the questions that you hear. If you realise, for example, that 'how often?' is a very common way to begin a question, you will be able to answer this sort of question more easily.

Questions can begin with one or more question words:

*Whose coat is that?*

*How will you get there?*

*How far is it to London?*

*What time are they coming?*

*What sort of music do you like?*

*How long ago did the match start?*

Some common problems connected with question words:

### WHICH and WHAT

'Which' is used with a limited choice:

*Which one of them shall I use?*

'What' suggests the choice is unlimited:

*What's the best thing to do?*

### HOW MUCH and HOW MANY

'How much' is used with uncountable nouns:

*How much information can you give me?*

'How many' is used with countable nouns:

*How many people came to the meeting?*

### HOW and WHAT...LIKE

'How' is used to ask about someone's health:

*How is your mother?*

'What...like' is used to ask about someone's character:

*What is the new director like?*

'How' is **wrong** to ask for descriptions of people, things or places:

*What did the man look like? What is New York like?*

## WHAT TIME and HOW LONG

'What time' is **not** preceded by 'at':

*At What time should we arrive?*

'How long' is **not** followed by 'time':

*How long **time** will you be staying?*

## DIRECT QUESTIONS

Typical errors:

*What means this word? What does this word mean?*

'Mean' is a verb which takes an object.

*Who did go with you? Who went with you?*

When the subject is contained in the question word(s), do not use an auxiliary.

*In what did you put it? What did you put it in?*

In spoken English, prepositions normally come at the end of the question.

## INDIRECT QUESTIONS

Word order:

*Do you know when will she arrive? Do you know when she will arrive?*

*Can you tell me how do I get there? Can you tell me how I get there?*

In questions beginning 'Do you know?', 'Can you tell me?' etc., the word order after the question word(s) is the same as in affirmative sentences.

## WHETHER and IF

In indirect questions, 'whether' means the same as 'if' and can be used where the answer is 'yes' or 'no':

*Could you tell me whether there's an earlier train, please?*

## REPORTED QUESTIONS

The same word order rule as for indirect questions:

*She asked me what was I doing it for? She asked me what I was doing it for.*

*He wanted to know what time was it. He wanted to know what time it was.*

(Note that you do not use a question mark if you write a reported question.)

## Exercise 1

What is the correct answer for each question?

1. How long is it?	a) Five.
2. What is she like?	b) More than ten years.
3. How far is it?	c) I don't know.
4. How long has it been?	d) Five euros a kilo.
5. What does she look like?	e) Five kilos.
6. How much are they?	f) Just over three miles.
7. How many of them are there?	g) Mine.
8. Whose is it?	h) She's tall and has dark hair.
9. What does it mean?	i) She's very pleasant really.
10. How much does it weigh?	j) About two metres.

## Exercise 2

Complete the short conversations below with the correct words.

1.

A) ..... did you begin planning your novel?

B) I wrote the main characters' names on the back of an envelope.

a) When

b) How

c) Why

2.

A) ..... is the city like?

B) It's very lively, with good nightlife all week.

a) Which

b) How

c) What

3.

A) ..... people think the local facilities are adequate?

B) In general yes, but we need a new swimming pool.

a) Does

b) Do

c) Has

4.

A) How .... we reschedule the meeting and still catch the flight home this evening?

B) It's going to be very difficult.

a) can

b) did

c) must

5.

A) ..... do you think about social media?

B) They have their good and bad points.

a) How

b) What

c) Whatever

6.

A) ..... technique do you have for avoiding stress?

B) Nothing special, maybe a good cup of tea in the morning.

a) What

b) Which

c) Whose

7.

A) What management experience ..... you had?

B) I was in charge of the office in my previous job.

a) did

b) has

c) have

8.

A) How ..... interested are you in video games?

B) I'm not interested in them at all.

a) Ø

b) much

c) far

9.

A) How ..... times has the system failed until now?

B) Just the once, as far as I know.

a) often

b) much

c) many

10.

A) What ..... the guests leave?

B) There wasn't any more food, and we had to vacate the premises.

a) made

b) time

c) for

### **Exercise 3**

**What is the correct answer for each of the questions below?**

1. How many times have you visited the facility?

a) Just once, a couple of years ago

b) I worked on it all day on Tuesday

c) I was there for half an hour

2. What will the research lead to?

a) Another ten years

b) A better understanding of our clients' needs

c) We're leading the way in this research

3. What is your job like?

a) I like it very much

b) I'd really like to be an engineer.

c) Quite interesting most of the time

4. How do you get on with your work colleagues?

a) It was good to see them again

b) They're the best I've known

c) It's a small team

5. Whose idea was it originally?

a) It came from the accounts department

b) The board accepted it immediately

c) It hasn't been discussed enough

6. Can you tell me about your background?

- a) Your assistant introduced us
- b) I worked in IT for a long time
- c) I'm keen to take up the position

7. Will you be free after four?

- a) Four of us should be enough
- b) I'm tied up all afternoon
- c) I always do on Wednesday

8. How long was the company successful?

- a) It kept going until the 1980s
- b) Many employees have been laid off
- c) Production started in the 1960s

9. How much did the event raise?

- a) Over 200 people attended it
- b) More than \$20,000
- c) Prices were raised by 10%

10. When did the company sell its overseas interests?

- a) For 20 years, I think
- b) Since the market conditions have changed
- c) At least 10 years ago

#### **Exercise 4**

**Every sentence below contains an error. Correct the errors.**

1. How long time have you been married?

2. How does your brother look like?

3. Can you tell me where is the station?

4. Do you know where did he go?

5. Who's pen is this?

6 How is it like to be free and independent?

7. I asked her why she had changed her job?

8. What means 'spanner'?

9. At what time does the movie start?

10. When you graduated from university?

## Exercise 5

Use the answers to help you to complete the questions.

1. .... money have you invested?

We've invested all our savings.

2. .... is it to the national park from here?

It's more than 70 miles.

3. .... is the weather .... where you are?

It's sunny today, but it's been a rainy week.

4. .... is the new electric car .....

It is being built at our plant in the north

5. When .... the company .... its subsidiary?

It sold the subsidiary last year.

6. .... you born?

I was born in Toronto.

7. Can you tell me when .....

The next bus leaves in 15 minutes.

8. .... do you go to the cinema?

I go to the cinema regularly, at least once a week.

9. .... drawer did you put the letter .... ?

I put it in the top drawer on the left.

10. What is the .... of the Burj Khalifa and ..... it have?

The Burj Khalifa is 1728 metres tall and has 63 floors.

**to vacate – to leave**

**the premises (plural/formal) – the building**

**IT – Information Technology**

**a subsidiary – a company owned by a parent company**

**a drawer – part of a piece of furniture that you can pull out and put things in**

**keen – very willing, eager**

**savings – money not spent or put aside**