

40 Short questions

Short questions are a way of showing interest during conversation. They're used to keep conversation going, rather than to ask for new information.

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40.1 SHORT QUESTIONS

Short questions must be in the same tense as the statement they're responding to. If the statement is positive, the short question should be positive and vice versa. The subject from the statement is replaced with the relevant pronoun.

It's Tom's birthday today.



Is it?

For statements using "be," the short question uses the same form of "be."

I play golf every weekend.



Do you?

For other verbs, a form of "do" is used.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

I am going to visit my parents next week.



Are you?

"I am" becomes "are you" because it is directed back at the speaker.

I went to a party last night.



Did you?

The past simple of "do" is used to match "went," which is the past simple of "go."

Rob wasn't in the office this morning.



Wasn't he?

The negative is used to match the statement.

My son studies every night.



Does he?

The third person form "does" is used to match "studies."

40.2 SHORT QUESTIONS WITH AUXILIARY VERBS

If a statement contains an auxiliary verb, including modal verbs, that auxiliary verb is repeated in the short question.

I have just come back from Hawaii.



Have you?

Here, "have" is an auxiliary verb forming the present perfect.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

I couldn't wait to come to work today.



Couldn't you?

I've been working since 7am.



Have you?

The train should be here by now.



Should it?

I can't find my car keys.



Can't you?

40.3 SHORT QUESTIONS IN US ENGLISH

In US English, short questions are sometimes not inverted.

Roger is starting a new job tomorrow.



He is?

The subject and verb are not inverted, but this is said with a rising intonation.

My team didn't win the game last night.



They didn't?