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Purland on ELT – Episode 8 – Lesson Notes

Question Tags

7 facts about question tags:

1. Statement – usually short – plus question tag, with a question mark.
2. They are often used in spoken English.
3. In many languages (e.g. Polish) we can use the equivalent of *...yes?* In English we can say: yes, yeah, right (Am/E), OK, got it, understand, but the tone can be rude and confrontational/angry; too direct; English is not a direct language; it sounds like an order, and we don't like direct orders. (In Polish, use tak for checking and no nie or nie prawda for small talk (but this sounds old fashioned – old people say this), or no tag.)
4. We can use any auxiliary verbs, including modal auxiliary verbs. Present simple can be confusing – you have to choose DO/DOES or BE. Also past simple: DID or WAS/WERE. We use contractions; in rhetorical speech we can say, Is it not? Were we not? etc.
5. It is not as common with pronoun I. I'm... aren't I? (This is an oddity – we can't say am not I? amn't I? There is no contraction for am not.)
6. We can use them to sound sarcastic, e.g. 'That was a great film, wasn't it?' My descending tone shows that I believe the opposite – it was not a great film.
7. They are more difficult to use than they look – because of the thought process...

The thought process of using question tags:

1. Realise what tense it is
   e.g. They're meeting at ten, aren't they? (present continuous)
2. Realise what pronoun is used (e.g. two names become they) and match it
   They ... they
3. Is it a singular or plural subject? *They = plural*
4. Positive – negative; negative (even without not, e.g. never) – positive; do the opposite
   They're meeting... = positive, so the question tag has to be negative: ...aren't they
5. Match the auxiliary verb – *are > aren't*
6. Understand the context: need info or checking/making small talk; intonation differs:
   a. we are asking a question; we want an answer: information – voice goes up
   b. we are sure that the listener agrees with us; something is obvious; we are just making (phatic: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phatic_expression) conversation; we want a response that means a quick agreement – voice goes down

   We need information – we're making plans

Lesson Plan:

1. SS write x short statements on the board – half of them positive and half negative
2. T elicits how to gain information or check (small talk) – tak? Look at English options; elicit wrong register/tone; SS practise some sentences together with the wrong tone
3. Try to elicit question tags; discuss the main points and the thought process
4. SS complete one or more of the worksheets – check the answers
5. SS write their own sentences with question tags (or for homework)

Other forms:

- Positive imperative: Stay here, will / won't you?
- Negative imperative: Don't move, will you?
- Let's: Let's go to the fair, shall we?
- Need to: We need to return this form, don't we?
- There is/are: There's a cow in that field, isn't there?
- There isn't: There isn't any jam left, is there?
- Somebody is/isn't: Somebody is late, aren't they? / Somebody isn't... are they?

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6 pages of worksheets plus answers:

- Question Tags Using Verbs ‘be’, ‘do’ and ‘have’ (present tense) 1
- Question Tags Using Verbs ‘be’, ‘do’ and ‘have’ (present tense) 2
- Question Tags Using Verbs ‘be’, ‘do’ and ‘have’ (past tense) 1
- Question Tags Using Verbs ‘be’, ‘do’ and ‘have’ (past tense) 2
- Question Tags Using Verbs ‘can’, ‘will’ and ‘must’
- Question Tags Using Verbs ‘could’, ‘would’ and ‘should’

Answers to worksheets:

7 1. aren’t I? 2. don’t you? 3. don’t I? 4. isn’t she? 5. haven’t they? 6. do I? 7. are you? 8. isn’t it? 9. hasn’t she? 10. hasn’t he? 11. don’t you? 12. doesn’t it? 13. isn’t it? 14. does he? 15. hasn’t it? 16. doesn’t he? 17. aren’t we? 18. doesn’t she? 19. have you? 20. haven’t you?

8 1. are you? 2. doesn’t she? 3. has she? 4. don’t we? 5. don’t they? 6. have we? 7. aren’t I? 8. are they? 9. is he? 10. doesn’t it? 11. haven’t they? 12. didn’t they? 13. isn’t he? 14. aren’t they? 15. has it? 16. have I? 17. do we? 18. isn’t she? 19. haven’t they? 20. haven’t I?

9 1. was I? 2. were they? 3. didn’t he? 4. hadn’t I? 5. weren’t they? 6. didn’t it? 7. had you? 8. didn’t it? 9. did I? 10. had she? 11. wasn’t I? 12. was she? 13. hadn’t it? 14. did we? 15. wasn’t she? 16. didn’t she? 17. had I? 18. did I? 19. hadn’t he? 20. didn’t he?

10 1. were you? 2. had he? 3. hadn’t they? 4. didn’t she? 5. wasn’t it? 6. didn’t you? 7. hadn’t we? 8. didn’t they? 9. were you? 10. wasn’t it? 11. hadn’t they? 12. had she? 13. was he? 14. didn’t we? 15. hadn’t you? 16. weren’t we? 17. didn’t you? 18. weren’t we? 19. hadn’t it? 20. didn’t they?

11 1. can’t I? 2. can’t they? 3. will it? 4. mustn’t it? 5. mustn’t I? 6. won’t I? 7. can she? 8. will I? 9. mustn’t they? 10. will he? 11. can I? 12. won’t he? 13. mustn’t you? 14. can’t he? 15. will you? 16. mustn’t she? 17. must they? 18. can’t it? 19. won’t you? 20. won’t they?

12 1. couldn’t I? 2. should I? 3. couldn’t he? 4. would we? 5. shouldn’t we? 6. wouldn’t she? 7. would I? 8. couldn’t you? 9. couldn’t he? 10. wouldn’t it? 11. should I? 12. wouldn’t I? 13. shouldn’t she? 14. could she? 15. would she? 16. shouldn’t he? 17. would they? 18. would you? 19. wouldn’t they? 20. couldn’t it?