
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The Grammar Gameshow

Question tags

Will

Hello, and welcome to today's Grammar Gameshow! I'm your host, Will! Just try and contract me, you'll see what happens! And of course, let's not forget Leslie, our all-knowing voice in the sky.

Leslie

Hello, everyone!

Will

Tonight, we're going to ask you three questions about...

Leslie

Question tags! Those little auxiliary verb plus pronoun combinations for checking and asking!

Will

OK! Now, let's meet our contestants!

Liz

Hello, all. My name's Liz!

Will

And contestant number two?

Felicia

It's nice to meet you. I'm Felicia!

Will

Nice to see you again, Liz! This will be four in a row for you, won't it? Win this one and you'll be our longest running contestant, won't you? This is Gameshow history, isn't it?

Liz

I'll do my best!

Will

That's the spirit. I might even let it help you. OK. Let's get going, and don't forget you can play along at home too. Here comes round one! Fingers on buzzers. What is the basic rule for construction of a question tag?

Felicia

Use an auxiliary verb that matches the main verb phrase, but opposite – such as positive to negative. Then, add a pronoun that refers to the subject.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

Well done! Let's get some practice. I'll give you the sentence, and you'll give me the question tag. He can play football.

Felicia

He can play football, can't he?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

You didn't see James.

Liz

You didn't see James, did you?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

She never cleans up.

Felicia

She never cleans up, does she?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

They have been to France

Liz

They've been to France, haven't they?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

You hardly ever study.

Felicia

You hardly ever study, do you?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

I'm amazingly cool

Liz

I'm amazingly cool, aren't I?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

Err...

Liz

Sorry. You are amazingly cool, aren't you?

Leslie

Also correct, though factually inaccurate.

Will

No bread or water for you tonight, Leslie! Do your job!

Leslie

That was good work, wasn't it? Question tags are used to ask questions or check information. They are constructed by using an auxiliary verb from the main verb phrase and a pronoun referring to the subject. If the main verb phrase is affirmative, the question tag should be negative and vice versa!

Will

Well done, both of you. 10 points to Felicia and five to Liz.

Liz

What? Why five?

Will

You're nearly our next champion. You didn't think we were going to just give it to you, did you? Our last champion was so wonderful. I'll never forget her. Good old... Mya? Mya! Mya. Anyway, on to round two. This is a triple threat round. Three questions... get them right all to score. Question one: What is the question tag for an imperative, such as: 'Be quiet'?

Liz

Use a modal verb like 'could' or 'will'. Be quiet, could you?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

That's just rude! Minus three points. Question two: What is the pronoun used in a question tag for sentences using 'there', such as: 'There's no hope!'

Liz

We repeat the 'there'. There's no hope, is there?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

You should never give up hope! Minus 100 points for being a pessimist. Last question: What is the pronoun used in question tags using words like 'somebody' or 'something'?

Liz

For 'somebody' we use 'they'. Somebody wants me to win, don't they? As for 'something', we use 'it'. Something went wrong, didn't it?

Leslie

Correct!

Will

Leslie?

Leslie

Nice, nice, nice! Imperatives have no auxiliary verb. To make a question tag with one, use a modal verb such as 'could', 'would' or 'will', but be careful of being impolite. For sentences using 'there' as a subject, also use 'there' in the question tag. Finally, with words like

'somebody', 'everybody' and 'nobody', use 'they'. And for 'something', 'everything', and 'nothing', use 'it'.

Will

Well done, Felicia! 60 points to you!

Liz

But I answered the questions!

Will

Come on, champ! No one likes a sore loser! Suck it up a bit!

Felicia

Yeah! Suck it up a bit, won't you?

Will

No one likes a sore winner either, Felicia.

Felicia

Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.

Will

On to our last question. Is this question tag correct? When would someone use it? 'You're getting married, are you?'

Felicia

Yes, it's correct. Double positive tags are possible.

Will

Why?

Felicia

Funny that... it's dropped out of my head.

Will

Liz?

Felicia

They often express surprise or concern or other emotional emphasis.

Will

Very professionally done, champ. Leslie?

Leslie

I couldn't have put it better myself... so I won't! Double positive question tags are common after affirmative sentences. They are usually used as responses to something that has just been said. The speaker repeats the information they've just heard and uses the tag to show interest, surprise, concern or some other emotional emphasis.

Will

Excellent work! You're a fighter Liz. That's why I'm giving you minus 12 points. And that brings us to the end of today's Grammar Gameshow. Let's count out the points... And the winner is... Liz with 53. Well done! Here's what you've won!

Leslie

It's a boxing glove! You're king of the world, champ!

Will

We'll see you again next week, where you can play for another prize. And Felicia... you didn't really stand a chance, did you?

Felicia

How does any of this make any sense?

Will

It doesn't even matter! Free the horses! It looks like we'll need another contestant. Thanks for joining us. Say goodbye Leslie!

Leslie

Pa makha de kha Leslie!

Will

See you next time.