

Catherine's Grammar Explanation: Question Tags (Form)

Catherine:

Hi Juliana! Mark and Elena asked a short question at the end of most of their sentences. These questions are called question tags. We use them either to ask for information, or to check information we already have, or just to keep the conversation going.

Question tags have two parts: a helping verb, or auxiliary verb – like do, have, or can, and a pronoun. Let's look at the helping verb first. Usually, for a **negative** sentence, you need to use a **positive** helping verb in the question tag. Listen to Elena:

Elena: We haven't got any carrots, have we?

The sentence 'we **haven't** got any carrots' is **negative**, so the question tag is **positive: 'have we'**. Listen again:

Elena: We haven't got any carrots, have we?

Now, when the sentence is **positive**, the question tag is **negative**. Here's Mark:

Mark: The shops are open late tonight, aren't they?

The sentence: 'The shops **are** open late tonight' is positive, so the helping verb - '**aren't**' in the question is negative. Listen again:

Mark: The shops are open late tonight, aren't they?

BBC Learning English

Grammar Challenge



bbclearningenglish.com

© British Broadcasting Corporation 2007

Now sometimes there isn't a helping verb in positive sentences.

When there isn't a helping verb, we use the correct form of the verb **do** to make the question tag:

Mark: Elena, you like carrots, don't you?

And as for the second part of the question tag – the pronoun – you use the pronoun that corresponds to the subject of the sentence. For example, **you** like carrots, don't **you**, or **the shops** are open late tonight, aren't **they**?

OK that's all from me, good luck with your grammar challenge!