Section 8  questions and negatives

page 103

language notes

Question and negative forms of be, have, modal verbs and the various tenses of other verbs are practised in Sections 1–7. However, English question and negative formation is complicated. This Section is especially useful for students who have already done the basic work but still have difficulty forming these structures correctly. Continuing mistakes may include sentences like:

*What you are doing?
*Where all those people are going?
*Where were going all those people?
*Where you work?
*What does he wants?
*What she said?
*What did they wanted?
*I no understand/understood.
*She no has phoned.
*Why you no write to me?
*It not rains here in the summer.
*We don't working tomorrow.

possible further activities

The poems are simply intended to introduce two of the structures dealt with in the Section, and there is no need for students to do anything except read them. However, you might like to invite students to add their own four-line stanzas to ‘I didn’t do the housework’:

I didn’t …
I didn’t …
I didn’t …
I … instead.

They don’t have to rhyme.

pages 104–105

language notes

In spoken English, declarative yes/no questions (which have the same word order as statements) are quite often used to check one’s beliefs (‘You’re coming tonight?’). These are dealt with in Oxford English Grammar Course Advanced. At lower levels, it’s best if students keep to the normal structure (auxiliary before subject), until they have stopped making mistakes with interrogative word order.

possible further activities

Completing the structure  Say or write up questions with the first word missing. How quickly can students find the first word? (There may be more than one answer.) Examples of possible questions:

you swim? (Do or Can)  you see my keys?  he play football?
she understand? (Does, Did or Can)  you ready?  they speak Japanese?
you watch TV yesterday?  she been to Scotland?

An asterisk (*) indicates an incorrect form or use.  → Section 8 continues
**Question or statement?** Say third-person singular verbs and infinitives, mixed up. If students hear an infinitive, they put ‘Does she’ before it to make a question. If they hear a third-person form, they put ‘She’ before it to make a statement. Like this:

‘like’ – ‘Does she like?’
‘likes’ – ‘She likes.’
‘works’ – ‘She works.’
‘play’ – ‘Does she play?’

Keep it moving as fast as it will go without the students getting seriously confused.

**Twenty questions** In this well-known game, one person (the ‘thinker’) thinks of something, and the rest of the group or class try to find out what it is. They can only ask twenty questions; the thinker can only answer ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. It helps if you suggest some useful questions in advance, explaining vocabulary where necessary. For example:

Is it in this room?
Can you eat it?
Is it made of …?
Is it bigger than a …?
Is it a part of the body?
Is it manufactured?
Is it useful?

The thinker may like to give a clue at the beginning (e.g. ‘It’s in this room’). A common approach is to say in advance that the object is ‘animal’ (in origin), ‘vegetable’ (in origin), ‘mineral’ (in origin) or ‘abstract’. However, it needs to be made very clear that, for example, ‘animal’ does not mean that the object is necessarily an animal – leather shoes or butter are animal in origin. Similarly, a cotton shirt is vegetable and a computer is mineral. In any case, however clear you make it, there will always be somebody who doesn’t understand this. It may work best if you act as the thinker for at least one round, and then let the students play in groups.

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**pages 106–107**

**language notes**

German-speaking beginners sometimes confuse who and where (German wer = ‘who’).

**possible further activities**

**Structure with question words** Ask students how many different words they can think of that can come immediately after where in a four-word question (like is, can, have). Who can find the most? (This may help to reveal continuing problems, if some students write, for example, you, my or the.)

‘What … like?’ Tell students that you come from (or have visited) a country called Fantasia, where everything is different. Give them a few minutes to prepare questions in groups, using the structure What is/are … like? Help with vocabulary if necessary. Then they ask their questions. Make sure you have some interesting answers prepared – for example:

‘What are the houses like?’ ‘Very small and made of glass.’
‘What is the government like?’ ‘There isn’t one.’

**Questions** Students prepare twenty or more interesting questions about people’s pasts, interests, present activities etc, using the various question structures they have practised. When they are ready, they interview each other and write reports.

**Invented personalities** Students invent imaginary personalities for themselves, and then prepare questions and interview each other as above. (‘Where do you live?’ ‘On the moon.’)
**Class interview** As above, but with more questions. Bring somebody into the classroom (for example a colleague, a friend, a student from another class); students ask their questions and write reports on what they have found out. This can also be done by dividing the class into groups, getting each group to prepare questions on a different topic (e.g. past, interests, present activities, beliefs), and bringing in as many visitors as there are groups. Visitors then rotate from group to group.

**pages 108–109**

**language notes**

The special structure of questions that have *who* or *what* as a subject can cause confusion:

*Who did say that?*

*What did happen?*

**possible further activities**

**Extending Exercise 3** This is a rather ambitious activity, but it might be worth trying with a good class. Get students, in groups, to produce similar diagrams and sets of questions, using for example celebrities from the world of entertainment or political figures. Or, more simply, students can produce simple pairs of questions about particular well-known people (*Who does X love? Who loves X?*) and get each other’s answers.

**Quiz** Building on Exercises 6 and 7, get students to work in groups and prepare quizzes for the class, either using the structure practised here (*Who …*) or mixing various question structures. This can be done as a competition: take one group’s quiz and see which of the other students can get most answers right.

**page 110**

**possible further activities**

**Internet** Ask students if they can find five questions on the internet beginning “What are all those people …?” or “Why are all those people …?”.

**page 111**

**language notes**

Informal questions ending in prepositions are difficult for most students, since few languages have a similar structure:

*About what are you talking?*

*With who did you play?*

**possible further activities**

**Mime** You mime the following actions. Students ask you appropriate questions. 
looking at something (*What are you looking at?*)
listening to something
talking to yourself about something
talking to somebody
writing to somebody
possible further activities

*Mime*  Students mime things that they don’t do. The rest of the class guess what is meant. (‘You don’t play the piano.’ ‘You don’t drive.’)

*Predictions*  Students write sentences about things that they probably won’t do in the future. (‘I probably won’t work in a bank.’)

*Lies*  Tell the students five things about yourself, including one lie. Students pick out the lie and contradict you. (‘You don’t live in a palace.’) Students can do the same in groups.

possible further activities

*‘No’ or ‘not’?*  Say a series of well-known nouns, adjectives and adverbs. Students repeat the words, putting either *no* or *not* before them. Like this:
‘money’ – ‘no money’  ‘ready’ – ‘not ready’  ‘fast’ – ‘not fast’
‘bread’ – ‘no bread’  ‘today’ – ‘not today’  ‘tickets’ – ‘no tickets’
Don’t include verbs: they can be followed by either *no* or *not*, depending on the structure.

*Writing notices*  Each student writes a notice, using ‘NO’ with a noun or -ing form, to stop people doing something (in the classroom, in the town, in the country, …).

*Finding notices*  If students are in an English-speaking country, get them to look for notices beginning ‘NO’. If not, get them to look for notices that can be translated into English ‘NO’ notices. Who can find the most before the next lesson?

possible further activities

*‘Nobody …’*  Students try to write one sentence beginning in each of the following ways:
Nobody can …
Nobody knows …
Nobody wants …
Nobody likes …
Nobody will …

*Internet*  Students find one or more interesting sentences on the internet beginning “Nobody will ever …”, and one or more beginning “Nobody has ever …”.

*‘Never’*  Students write or say sentences about themselves (one or more) beginning in each of the following ways:
I never … (simple present)
I have never …
I will never …