# ESOL E3 – Questioning

# 1 of 15 – Introduction

Welcome to this session on Questioning.

In this session, you will learn about how different types of question can be asked during a discussion.

By the end of this session you will be able to:

* Use rising and falling intonation when asking different types of question
* Tell the difference between open and closed questions
* Use probing questions to explore for more detail
* Use tag questions to check for approval
* Tell the difference between leading and neutral questions

# 2 of 15 – Questions

Asking questions is an important part of participating in a discussion.

By asking relevant and appropriate questions, we can achieve many things during a discussion, including:

* We can show other people we are listening to what they are saying
* We can gain more information about the topic being discussed
* We can check something we did not hear or did not understand

By asking the right questions at the right time, we can effectively move a discussion forward and help the speaker go into detail about their topic of conversation.

# 3 of 15 – Using intonation when asking a question

Almost all written questions are ended by using a **question mark** to show the statement is a question.

When speaking, we can show that we are asking a question by using **intonation**.

Intonation means the way the pitch of our voice changes throughout a sentence, for example going higher or lower.

In most questions starting with **what, where, when, why** or **how,** we use **falling intonation** on the **last syllable** in our question which is **stressed**. Falling intonation means that our voice gets lower (decreases in pitch). For example:

“What time does the supermarket close?”

The pitch falls at the end of the word “close”. Your voice should get lower.

“When are you going to arrive?”

During the word “arrive” your voice should get lower.

“How do you get to the post office?”

The falling intonation happens on the word “post”, as this is the **last stressed syllable** (“office” is unstressed).

# 4 of 15 – Using intonation when asking a yes or no question

In questions where the answer is **yes or no**, we use **rising intonation** on the **last stressed syllable** in the question.

Rising intonation means that our voice gets higher (increases in pitch). For example:

“Are you hungry?”

The pitch rises at the end. During the word “hungry” your voice should get higher.

“Do you want to go to the cinema?”

During the word “cinema”, your voice should get higher.

“Have you seen it?” The rising intonation happens on the word “seen”, as this is the **last stressed syllable** (“it” is unstressed).

# 5 of 15 – Question 1

Which of the following questions should end with rising or falling intonation?

1. What time are we leaving for the airport?
2. Would you like a cup of tea?
3. Will you to the party?
4. How are you doing?
5. Where is your car parked?
6. Are you ready to go?

The correct answers are:

Sentences that should end with rising intonation are: b), c) and f).

Sentences that should end with falling intonation are: a), d) and e).

# 6 of 15 – Closed questions

Closed questions are questions to which there are a limited number of answers, for example:

* Yes or no
* Correct or incorrect
* Left or right

These can also be called alternative questions because they have two or more alternative answers. An example of a closed question would be: “Do you prefer tea or coffee?” because there are only two possible answers – tea or coffee.

# 7 of 15 – Open questions

Open questions are questions which do not limit the answer.

Open questions leave the possible response open, meaning the person we ask the question to, can answer however they want.

An example of an open question would be: “What is your favourite drink?” because the possible answer is open to whatever the other person wants to say.

In discussions, open questions are usually better than closed questions because they do not restrict the conversation. They allow the other person to go into more depth with their reply, and allow the discussion to move forward and develop.

For example, in a discussion with someone about pets, it would be better to ask: “What is your favourite animal, and why?” rather than: “Do you like cats or dogs?” because it allows them to reply however they want to, and does not restrict their response to one word.

# 8 of 15 – Question 2

You are having a conversation with your friend Karina about sports. Karina says, “I prefer racket sports to ball sports because I enjoy the solo aspect, rather than playing on a team.”

Which of the following is the best choice of open question to reply to this and develop the discussion?

1. Do you like tennis or badminton more?
2. Do you like squash or not?
3. What are your favourite racket sports and why?
4. Do you play tennis at the community centre?

The correct answer is c). This is an open question about racket sports, so Karina will be able to answer however she wants to. It does not restrict her answer to any particular response.

# 9 of 15 – Probing questions

Probing questions are questions which we can use to explore more information with someone.

During a discussion, if someone is talking about something we want to know more about, we can ask a probing question, to ask them to go into more depth about that topic.

Some examples of probing questions are:

* Asking why, for example: “Why do you think that hockey is better than netball?”
* Asking for an example, for example: “What happened last time you went there?”
* Asking for more detail, for example: “Can you tell me more about that?”
* Asking to get clarification, for example: “So does that mean that you don’t like spiders?”

# 10 of 15 – Question 3

Your colleague William is telling you about his favourite TV programme. He says, “There is a new episode out every Tuesday evening. I like the programme because it has lots of action and zombies.”

Which of the following is the best choice of probing question to ask William so that he can give more detail?

1. Oh really?
2. Do you prefer zombies or vampires?
3. Why do you like action programmes more than other genres?

The correct answer is c). This is a probing question which asks William about his interest in action programmes, so it will prompt him to go into more detail.

# 11 of 15 – Tag questions

**Tag questions** are made up of a statement followed by a question to check.

They are often used during discussions to check for approval, to be polite or to emphasise a point.

Here are some examples of tag questions:

* Isn’t/hasn’t/won’t/doesn’t, followed by: it/he/she?
* For example, “His name is John, **isn’t it**?”
* Right/Is that right?
* For example, “You prefer sweets to chocolate, **right**?”
* Correct/Is that correct?
* For example, “My appointment is at 10:30 tomorrow, **is that correct**?”
* Shall I/we
* For example, “I’ll put the kettle on, **shall I**?”

# 12 of 15 – Question 4

You have invited some of your friends to your house for a drink and want to use tag questions to politely check that you are making the right drinks for everyone. Using either “didn’t you?” or “shall I?” or “is that right?” use the most appropriate choice, to complete the following sentences:

1. I’ll go and make the drinks …
2. Sharon, you wanted a cup of tea …
3. Ahmed, you prefer coffee though …

The correct answers are:

1. I’ll go and make the drinks … shall I?
2. Sharon, you wanted a cup of tea … didn’t you?
3. Ahmed, you prefer coffee though … is that right?

# 13 of 15 – Leading questions

Leading questions are a type of question that prompts the person to answer in a particular way, based on how they are asked.

An example of a leading question would be: “How much did you love that film?”

This is a leading question because it is making the assumption that the other person loved the film. A more neutral way to ask this question would be: “What did you think of the film?”

If the person didn’t like the film, this makes it easier for the other person to say, without being pushed towards a certain answer.

Leading questions can be useful in some cases, for example when you are trying to convince or persuade someone towards a certain opinion.

However, in most discussions, we should avoid using leading questions and change the wording, so they are more neutral questions instead.

# 14 of 15 – Question 5

Which of the following questions are leading questions?

1. What’s the best thing about our amazing new product?
2. What’s your opinion on the food here?
3. How delicious was that orange juice?
4. Most people hate the new logo. What do you think?
5. What are you doing after work?
6. What time is it in Paris?

The correct answers are: a), c) and d).

# 15 of 15 – Session conclusion

Well done, you have completed this session on Questioning.

You should now be able to:

* Use rising and falling intonation when asking different types of question
* Tell the difference between open and closed questions
* Use probing questions to explore for more detail
* Use tag questions to check for approval
* Tell the difference between leading and neutral questions

If you have any questions about anything covered in this session, please speak to your tutor for more help.