Remember to watch the video first! Then read the conversation between Sophie and Preeti, an English language student that Sophie met on her travels. Sophie's helping Preeti understand how to use question tags.

Grammar Snacks

We add question tags to the end of statements to turn them into questions. They are used in spoken language, especially when we want to check something is true, or invite people to agree with us.

Preeti

So how do we form question tags?

We add a clause in the form of a question at the end of a sentence. If the main part of the sentence is positive we usually add a negative question tag.

*It's a bit early, **isn't it**?*

If the main part is negative, we usually add a positive question tag.

*Mum isn't in trouble, **is she**?*

Sophie

OK, that seems easy.

Yes, but you need to think about what verb to use in the tag. If there is an auxiliary, a modal verb or the verb *to be* in the main clause, we use that in the question tag.

*You're in a desert in the middle of Australia, **aren't you**?*

If there is another main verb, we use *do* in the correct form (as we would with questions and negatives).

*I think she might be getting a bit old for this sort of travelling, **don't you**?*
*We told you not to drive in the outback on your own, **didn't we**?*

OK, so the question tag refers to the subject of the main sentence.

Yes, very often, but sometimes it doesn't.

*I can't imagine her doing anything else, **can you**?*

Are there any exceptions?

There are a few. We use 'aren't I' instead of the more logical 'amn't I'.

*I'm next in the queue, **aren't I**?*

Where is the stress in question tags?

It's on the verb and the intonation is usually falling, unless the speaker isn't sure about some kind of factual information, then it's rising.

*You're from Beijing, **aren't you**? (falling intonation = you're fairly sure)*

*You're from Beijing, **aren't you**? (rising intonation = you're not very sure and want the other person to confirm the information)*

You use them a lot in conversation, *don't you*?

Yes, we do. We use them a lot to try and involve other people in conversations.

So I'd better start using them more, *hadn't I*?

Yep!

Watch the video on our website!