

## Question Formulation (and Negative Statements) Made Simple

### I. Yes-No Questions

**Rule #1** – Affirmative statements with auxiliary verbs (can/could, may/might/must, will/would, shall/should) or the verbs *to be* (am, is, are, was, were) or *to have* (have, has, had)<sup>i</sup> can be made into yes-no questions by (1) reversing the order of the subject and the verb and (2) adding a question mark to the end of the sentence.

Example #1 – I can understand English very well. → Can I understand English very well?

Example #2 – He is in Chicago. → Is he in Chicago?

**Rule #2** – Affirmative statements without auxiliary verbs (or *to be* or *to have*<sup>i</sup>) can be made into yes-no questions by (1) adding *do*, *does*, or *did* before the subject,<sup>ii</sup> (2) changing the primary verb back to its base form, and (3) adding a question mark to the end of the sentence.

Example #1 – They enjoy their English class. → Do they enjoy their English class?

Example #2 – He seemed to be very busy. → Did he seem to be very busy?

### II. Information Questions

**Rule #1** – Affirmative statements with auxiliary verbs (see the list in Part I) or the verbs *to be* or *to have*<sup>i</sup> can be made into information questions by (1) putting the appropriate *wh-* word at the beginning of the sentence, (2) reversing the order of the subject and the verb, (3) deleting the portion of the sentence that answers the question posed by the *wh-* word, and (4) adding a question mark to the end of the sentence. (Note that this rule simply builds on Rule #1 for yes-no questions by adding a couple of steps.)

Example #1 – I can understand English very well. (What) → What can I understand very well?

Example #2 – He is in Chicago. (Where) → Where is he?

**Rule #2** – Affirmative statements without auxiliary verbs (or *to be* or *to have*<sup>i</sup>) can be made into information questions by (1) putting the appropriate *wh-* word at the beginning of the sentence, (2) adding *do*, *does*, or *did* before the subject, (3) changing the primary verb back to its base form, (4) deleting the portion of the sentence that answers the question posed by the *wh-* word, and (5) adding a question mark to the end of the sentence. (Note that this rule simply builds on Rule #2 for yes-no questions by adding a couple of steps.)

Example #1 – They enjoyed their English class. (What) → What did they enjoy?

Example #2 – He lives in Florida. (Where) → Where does he live?

**Rule #3** – When substituting the subject of any affirmative statement with a *wh*- word (regardless of whether or not it has an auxiliary verb), the word order remains EXACTLY the same. Since *wh*- words are, grammatically-speaking, third-person singular, the verbs *to be* and *to have*<sup>i</sup> as well as all present tense verbs may sometimes need to be changed to third-person singular (even if they are replacing a plural subject) in order to maintain subject-verb agreement.

Example #1 – Coffee is one of the chief exports from Brazil. (What) →  
What is one of the chief exports from Brazil?

Example #2 – Lester crept along the beach. (Who) → Who crept along the beach?

Example #3 – Missy Franklin and Michael Phelps have won many Olympic medals. (Who) →  
Who has won many Olympic medals.

### III. Negative Statements

**Rule #1** – Affirmative statements with auxiliary verbs (see the list in Part I) or the verbs *to be* or *to have*<sup>i</sup> can be made into negative statements by either (1) adding *not* after the verb or (2) replacing the verb with its negative contraction.

Example #1 – I can understand English very well. → I cannot understand English very well.  
**or** I can't understand English very well.

Example #2 – He is in Chicago. → He is not in Chicago. **or** He isn't in Chicago.

**Rule #2** – Affirmative statements without auxiliary verbs (or *to be* or *to have*<sup>i</sup>) can be made into negative statements by adding *do not*, *does not*, or *did not* (or, alternatively, *don't*, *doesn't*, or *didn't*) before the verb.<sup>iii</sup>

Example #1 – They enjoy their English class. → They do not enjoy their English class. **or**  
They don't enjoy their English class.

Example #2 – He seemed to be very busy. → He did not seem to be very busy. **or**  
He didn't seem to be very busy.

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<sup>i</sup> If students have not yet been introduced to the perfect tenses (present perfect, present perfect continuous, past perfect, or past perfect continuous), the verb *to have* can be omitted from the explanation of this rule.

<sup>ii</sup> Be sure to remind students that *did* is used in conjunction with past tense verbs, *does* is used in conjunction with present tense third-person singular verbs, and *do* is used with simple present tense verbs.

<sup>iii</sup> Be sure to remind students that *did not* is used in conjunction with past tense verbs, *does not* is used in conjunction with present tense third-person singular verbs, and *do not* is used with simple present tense verbs.