



DIRECT AND INDIRECT QUESTIONS IN BUSINESS



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Expemo code:
18BI-86X9-SLX8

1 Presentation

When we ask for information, we often use **direct questions**: *Where is the boss?*

If we want to be more polite or formal, we can use **indirect questions**: *Can you tell me where the boss is?*

Direct questions	Indirect questions
<p>Direct questions are normal questions:</p> <p>What time is it?</p> <p>How long does the journey take?</p> <p>Why are you negotiating with that client?</p> <p>How long have you been working here?</p> <p>Is he at the office?</p> <p>Did she reply to your email?</p>	<p>Indirect questions begin with Could you tell me ..., Can you tell me ..., I'd like to know ..., Do you know ..., etc.:</p> <p>Can you tell me what time it is?</p> <p>Do you know how long the journey takes?</p> <p>I'd like to know why you are negotiating with that client.</p> <p>Could you tell me how long you've been working here?</p> <p>Do you know if he is at the office?</p> <p>I wonder if she replied to your email.</p>

Rules for forming direct and indirect questions

Direct questions can be **simple questions** (*Are you at the office?*), **subject questions** (*Who sold you the car?*) or **object questions** (*How much did they make?*).

With **simple questions** and **object questions** we use special word order for questions:



If there is a 'helping verb' (*auxiliary verb*), for example **will**, **was**, **have**, and **can**, we put the subject after the *auxiliary verb*:

Can you help me? Where **will Kate** be tomorrow? How many languages **can you** speak?

In **simple present** and **simple past** questions, we use **do/does/did**:

Where **do they** work? **Did the client** call you back?

Indirect questions have the same word order as statements (*subject before verb*):

Do you know how long **the journey** takes?

We do not use **do/does/did** in the question: Do you know how long ~~does~~ the journey ~~take~~ takes?

If there is no question word (**who**, **where**, **why**, **how**, etc.) in the **direct question**, we can use **if** or **whether** in the **indirect question**:

I wonder **if** she replied to your email.

I wonder **whether** she replied to your email.



2 Practice 1

Rewrite the questions below as indirect questions.

- 1. Where is your office?
Could you tell me where your office is?
- 2. How do you say this in English?
I'd like to know
- 3. Do you offer a discount for new clients?
Can you tell me
- 4. How long did the meeting take?
I wonder
- 5. How did you fix the printer issue?
Can you explain
- 6. When are you going to sign the contract?
Please tell me
- 7. How long has he been waiting?
I don't know
- 8. Why did you sell your business?
I'm curious



3 Practice 2 - Job interview

Complete the dialogue below.

- Interviewer:** Let's talk about your previous job. Could you describe _____¹ (what were your responsibilities?)
- Michael:** Well, my duties included answering the phone, dealing with customers, and organizing meetings for the director.
- Interviewer:** And can you tell us _____² (why did you quit?)
- Michael:** Well, after 5 years in the same company, I felt that I was ready for a different challenge.
- Interviewer:** Could you tell us _____³ (why would you like to work for our company?)



Michael: Yes. Your company is well-known all over the world.

Interviewer: Hmm. I'd like to know _____⁴. (what are your weaknesses?)

Michael: Well, I am a perfectionist, and sometimes this can be a problem. But I'm working on it.

Interviewer: OK. Please let us know _____⁵ (can you start next week?)

Now listen to check your answers. Scan the code on the right with your mobile device.

4**Practice 3 - Sales meeting**

Now do the same with the following dialogue.

Charles: I'd like to know about your company's experience in the market. Could you tell me _____¹ (how many customers do you have?)

Supplier: We have around 10,000 customers around the world.

Charles: And can you tell us _____² (where are they based?)

Supplier: Our customers are mostly in Brazil, Spain, and France.

Charles: OK, great. And could you tell us _____³
(how many years have you been in the market?)

Supplier: Oh, our company was established about 15 years ago, so we're quite experienced.

Charles: OK. Could you tell me _____⁴ (do you have any experience with large companies?)

Supplier: Sure. One of our main customers is Samsung.

Charles: Interesting. _____⁵ (I / get a reference from them?)

Charles: Sure, I'll email it to you after this meeting.



5 Practice 4

Make indirect questions from the direct questions. In pairs, take turns to ask and answer the questions.

- 1. How do you get to work every day?
Can you tell me
- 2. How long have you been working for your company?
I'd like to know
- 3. What was your first job?
I'm interested to know
- 4. Do you enjoy your work?
Could you tell me
- 5. How often do you use English in your work?
I'd like to know
- 6. Are you going to attend any meetings tomorrow?
Could you tell me