

Lesson #6

# *Business Talk* *Asking Questions*

*Lesson Plan by Catherine Schell*



# Business Talk Asking Questions

## WARM-UP:

### Intonation

What is it? How does intonation influence the way we perceive and received information?

**Consider:** You're happy. (**falling intonation**)  
You're happy? (**rising intonation**)

*Intonation is the use of changing pitch in order to convey different information. In the first example, the pitch is falling because it is a statement. In the second sentence the pitch is rising because it is a 'yes/no' question. A different pitch may be used on single words or expressions as well. For instance, the word happy may be stressed in order to emphasize the fact that the speaker is addressing the notion of happiness as opposed to sadness, anger, frustration, etc.*

### Intonation and questions

Indicate whether the intonation is rising or falling in the following sentences:

It's hot today. Falling  
Is it hot today? Rising  
What is the weather like today? Falling  
When does the game start? Falling

*Typically, the intonation in English rises in 'yes/no' questions and falls in 'Wh-' questions.*

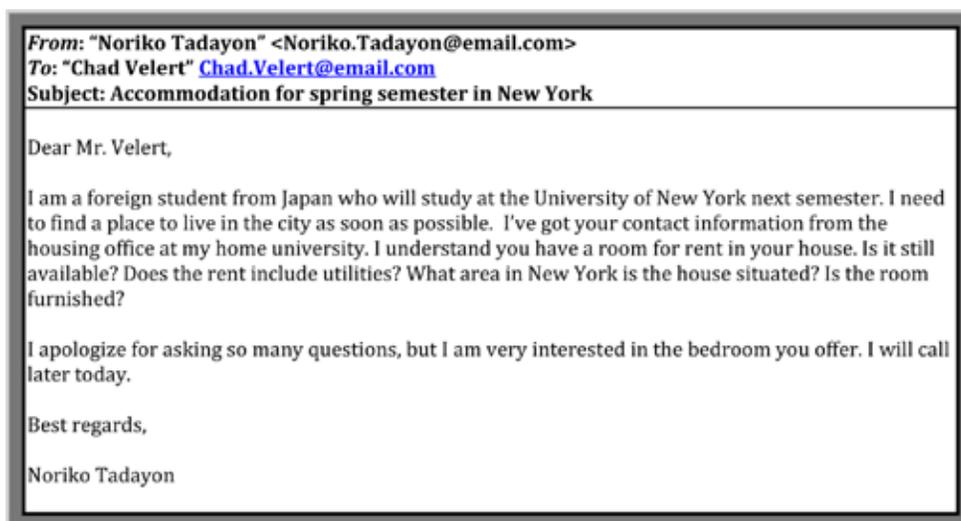
**I'd like to find out some more information please.**



# Business Talk Asking Questions

## TEXTS

A business email..



Later on the phone...

- Noriko:** Hello Mr. Velert, this is Noriko. How are you?
- Mr. Velert:** Hello Noriko! I'm good, thank you. How are you? I received your message about the room for rent. It is still available. Are you interested? Do you want to see it?
- Noriko:** Most definitely! How much is the rent? Does the rent include utilities? Is there a deposit?
- Mr. Velert:** The utilities are included in the rent, and there is a one-month deposit. The rent is \$850.
- Noriko:** Oh, that's expensive!
- Mr. Velert:** Not for New York! It is actually very reasonable. The neighborhood is very quiet, and you have shops, restaurants and a laundromat only a stone's-throw away.
- Noriko:** When are you available to show me the room?
- Mr. Velert:** Well, I'm free tomorrow. What does your day look like? How about 2pm?
- Noriko:** I'm free at 2pm. I have your address. I will see you then! Have a good day.
- Mr. Velert:** See you tomorrow. Have a good day as well.



## Work on the Texts

### 1. What is the meaning of the following:

- Will (email, line 2) **Indicates the future**
- Utilities (email, line 5) **A commodity or service (i.e. water, gas, Internet, etc.)**
- A stone's throw away (phone conversation, line 11) **Very close (so close you could throw a stone and it would land in that place)**

### 2. How many different types of questions can you find in these two texts? Which questions may only elicit a 'yes' or a 'no' as an answer?

There are 3 types of questions:

- Do + verb
- Be + subject
- Wh- questions (how, what, where, etc.)

The intonation is different for all three. While it rises in the first two, it is falling in the last category. Only the first two kinds of questions may elicit a 'yes' or a 'no'.

### 3. Which words or expressions can be stressed using intonation in the second text? What differences can a different intonation / stress make?

- Still: Mr. Velert can stress that word in order to show urgency (i.e. that the room might not be available for too long)
- Expensive: Noriko can stress that word to express his surprise at the price of the room.
- Very: Mr. Velert can stress those words in order to downplay Noriko's surprise and to emphasize the ideal location of the house.

## LESSON

Asking questions and answering

There are many ways to ask a question. The structure will be different depending on the context – i.e. whether it is formal or informal. There are also two types of questions: yes/no questions and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions always require more information than 'yes' or 'no' to provide an acceptable answer to the question.

### Examples:

- Are you cold? => **Yes**, I am / **No** I'm not.
- Do you have brothers and sisters? => **Yes**, I do / **No** I don't.
- How are you? => I'm fine / I'm doing well / I'm not doing well / etc.
- Where do you live? I live in the USA / India / Brazil / etc.



## LESSON (cont.)

When 'be' is the main verb of the answer, it is also used in the question. Those questions are always 'yes/no' questions.

**Examples:** Is he happy? => Yes, he is / No, he isn't.

In most cases, the verb 'do' is used to ask questions (when it includes a verb other than 'be'):

**Examples:** Do you live in a city? => Yes, I live in a city / No, I don't live in a city.

Where do you go to school? => I go to school in my hometown.

Here is a table showing you how to conjugate and use 'do' with the negation:

|                                       |                         |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| I do / I don't                        | We do / We don't        |
| You do / You don't                    | You do / You don't      |
| He-she-it does /<br>He-she-it doesn't | They do / They<br>don't |

This one shows how to use 'do' when asking questions:

|   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| Do I...? Don't I...?                        | Do we...? Don't we...?     |
| Do you...? Don't you...?                    | Do you...? Don't you...?   |
| Does he-she-it...?<br>Doesn't he-she-it...? | Do they...? Don't they...? |

In order to ask specific information, special interrogative words can be used:

**WHAT:** to emphasize the object of the action.

**Example:** What do you generally eat for lunch? => I generally eat a sandwich.

**WHO:** to emphasize the subject of the action.

**Example:** Who is your boss? => Mr. Stevens is my boss.



## LESSON (cont.)

WHERE: to emphasize the location of the action.

**Example:** Where do they live? => They live in McLeane

WHEN: to emphasize the moment of the action.

**Example:** When does she come back from work? => She comes back around 7pm.

WHY: to emphasize the reason of the action.

**Example:** Why do you play the lottery? => I play because I want to be a millionaire.

HOW: to emphasize the circumstances of the action.

**Example:** How is the weather today? => The weather is nice.

## Exercises

### 1. Find the questions in the list that best fit one of the following sentences:

- |                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| a) I'm fine.          | 1. What time is it?      |
| b) In Boston          | 2. How are you?          |
| c) It's 2pm.          | 3. Do you like football? |
| d) This is Samantha.  | 4. Where does he live?   |
| e) No I don't.        | 5. Are they in the area? |
| f) Yes, they're here. | 6. Who is this?          |

**Answers: A2, B4, C1, D6, E3, F5**

### 2. Circle the correct forms of 'do' in the following questions and answers:

- a) **Does/doesn't** the American flag have stars and stripes?  
Yes, it does/doesn't/do/don't.

**Both can be used. If the negative is used, it denotes a certain skepticism on the part of the speaker.**

- b) When do/does the American people vote for the President?

**People is plural in English.**

- c) Do/does/don't the President sign the bills voted by Congress?  
Yes, sometimes he do/does/don't/doesn't.

**Both can be used. If the negative is used, it denotes a certain skepticism on the part of the speaker.**

- d) What does the Supreme Court do?

It guarantees the constitutionality of laws.



## Exercises (cont.)

### 3. Find the correct interrogative (what / when / who / where / why / how) in the following questions about Noriko and Mr. Velert's room for rent:

- WHEN** is the room available? It is available on January 3rd.
- WHERE** is Noriko going to study? He is going to study at the University of New York.
- WHY** does Noriko look for a room to rent? He is looking for a room to rent because he is coming to study in New York next semester.
- HOW** expensive is the room in Mr. Velert's house? The rent for the room in Mr. Velert's house is \$850.

### 4. Build a question with the following words:

- Does Mr. Velert have a house?
- How do Noriko and Mr. Velert communicate?
- Where does Noriko live?
- Why doesn't Noriko look for an apartment?

### 5. Group activity: develop and perform the following scenarios with classmates.

- You're at a bazaar and try to negotiate the price of different items of your choice you would like to buy. Create a conversation with the vendor.
- Mystery person: students chose the name of a famous person, write it on a piece of paper, and stick it to the back of one of their classmates. When all students have a name on their back, they have to ask each other questions about that person to figure out who they are.

### 6. Follow-up on the text

Noriko went to visit the room for rent and he liked it. Imagine a follow-up email to Mr. Velert in which he decides to arrange details for his move into the room. You may use some of the vocabulary below. You could start by asking Mr. Velert more information about the laundromat in the neighborhood.

|            |             |                |
|------------|-------------|----------------|
| to inquire | a direction | an appliance   |
| to move in | a lamp      | a bed          |
| to pack    | furniture   | a box          |
| to unpack  | a payment   | a check        |
| to tidy    | a truck     | a confirmation |
| to wonder  | a direction | a couch        |
| to plan    | a lamp      | a desk         |



## Wind-down

For a VOA News article related studying in the USA and funding options:

<http://blogs.voanews.com/student-union/2010/11/12/a-month-of-financial-aid-discussions-exploring-funding-options/#more-1277>

Here are a few questions on the text:

a) Are public universities usually cheaper in the USA?

“Even public universities, which tend to be cheaper, will typically only offer their lowest tuition rates to residents of a particular state.”

b) Do some schools offer financial aid to foreign students?

“In fact, there are a select number of schools that are nearly free, and some schools that are very generous towards international students when it comes to financial aid based on merit or need.”

c) Does the State Department offer some financial help?

“Besides the well-known Fulbright program, there are a number of other State Department-funded options, and a number of scholarships funded privately or by non-profits.”

Add your story to the ‘Stories from the trenches’ Students can share their own story of going and studying abroad / their plans for going and studying abroad.

Article in ‘Wind down’: Student Union Blog (VOA)

Photos: Clip Art



On Facebook: VOA LearningEnglish  
Learn English with the English Doctor and  
the English Traveler at [www.voanews.com/theclassroom](http://www.voanews.com/theclassroom)

Voice of America's EFL  
Teaching Community  
Lesson 6: Page 8  
06.20.11

