

Indirect Questions

Indirect Questions

When we desire to ask questions in a polite way, we can use what in grammar is known as **Indirect Questions**.

Imagine the following situation: You are waiting for your turn in the bank and you need to know the time. This lady is near you.

The usual way (**Direct Question**) of asking for the time is:

*What time **is it**, please?*



A polite **Indirect Question** for this is:

Can you tell me what time **it is**, please?

Observe that in the **Indirect Question** there is a **question opener** (*Can you tell me...*) before the original question *What time...*, and the **subject** and the **verb/auxiliary** appear in the order of elements of an affirmative sentence.

Direct question:

*What time **is it**, please?*



Indirect question: ***Can you tell me*** what time **it is**, please?

(question opener)

Observe these other examples and the different **question openers** used.

Indirect Questions

Direct question:

Where *are* the restrooms?




Indirect question:

Could you tell me where the restrooms *are*?
(question opener)

Direct question:

Where *can* I find a bookstore near here?



Indirect question:

Do you know where I *can* find a bookstore near here?
(question opener)

In Simple Present or Simple Past questions, the auxiliaries *do/does* and *did* are **eliminated** from the Indirect question formula. As in affirmatives, no auxiliaries are used; in addition, the verbs must be used with the properties that affirmative sentences imply. This is why in the first example below, the verb *open* must end in *-s*; and in the second example, the verb in past.

Direct question:

When *does* the theater open?



Indirect question:

Can you tell me when the theater *opens*?

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Direct question: When *did the Romans* build this place?

Indirect question: **Do you know** when *the Romans* *built* this place?



As you could observe, the previous examples of Indirect questions were Information questions (questions using *what, where, when*, etc.). The following are Yes/No questions. Notice that the word *if* is added to link the **question opener** with the rest of the question.

Direct question: *Is the museum* open?

Indirect question: **Can you tell me** if *the museum* *is* open?

Direct question: *Do I* have to pay here?

Indirect question: **Could you tell me** if *I* *have* to pay here?

Direct question: *Does the store* close at 9:00 pm?

Indirect question: **Can you tell me** if *the store* *closes* at 9:00 pm?

Direct question: *Did the train* leave at 3:00?

Indirect question: **Do you know** if *the train* *left* at 3:00?