

Practice in asking meaningful questions

Question practice often focuses mainly on the form of the question (for example, transforming a sentence into a question: *I went home* → *Did you go home?*). While this may be useful as grammar practice, it doesn't pay attention to what the questions mean or why we would want to ask them.

The techniques in this worksheet focus on the meaning of questions as well as the form, and reflect two main reasons we ask questions in real life: to get further information and to get a clearer 'picture' of a situation.

Asking for details

1 Write one or two true sentences on the board about yourself or someone you know, for example:

My sister has just had a baby.

My daughter's living in Moscow.

- 2 Learners write a few questions to ask about each sentence (e.g. *When was it born? Is it a boy or a girl? Is it her first child? How is she feeling?*). Then they ask their questions. Give true answers, and (if necessary) correct the questions and focus on any grammar points that arise.
- 3 Learners write one or two sentences about themselves. In turn, they read out their sentences, and the other learners ask further questions.

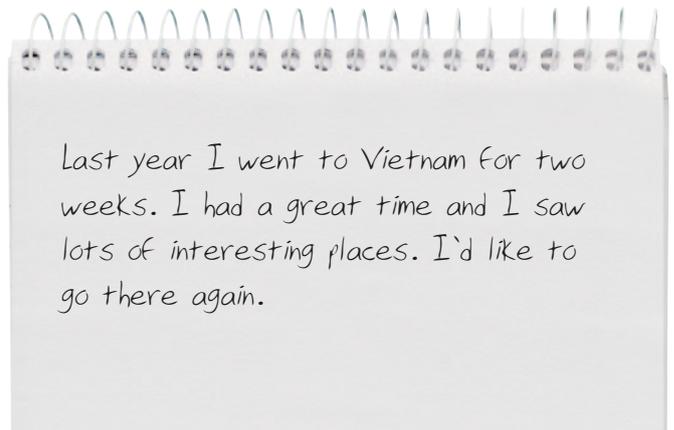
This technique can be used to practise questions with particular tenses and verb forms, e.g. the past simple. But note that most sentences naturally lead to questions using a variety of different tenses. For example: My daughter's living in Moscow → When did she go there? How long has she been there? Does she like it? What's she doing there?

Questions in writing

This is a similar technique, but learners write both questions and replies.

- 1 Learners write a short paragraph (two or three sentences), as in the example.
- 2 They pass their paragraph to another learner, who writes a few questions to get more information (e.g. *When did you go there? Were you alone? Where did you stay? What was the food like?*).
- 3 Learners pass the paragraph and the questions back to the original writer, who writes replies to the questions.

This technique can be used with almost any area of language, for example a description of your home or place of work, how you get to work or school, a description of someone you know, a news item, a description of a process, or an opinion. It's a good way to review topics or language areas from an earlier lesson.



English Unlimited Teaching Tips

Guessing a picture

Most teachers use simple guessing games to practise Yes/No questions. Here is a freer, more communicative technique where learners try to imagine a complete picture by asking any questions they like.

1 Hold up a picture (such as the one below) but don't show it to the class. They try to guess what it shows by asking questions. You should only give minimal information each time. For example:

Are there any people in the picture? (Yes)

How many are there? (Two)

Are they men or women? (A man and a woman)

What's the man wearing? (Trousers and a polo shirt)

Where are they? (At home, in the kitchen)

What are they doing? (Having an argument)

2 When the learners have guessed more or less all the details of the picture, ask them to describe it (giving a fact each around the class). Alternatively, they could do this in pairs first, to see if they can visualise the 'whole picture'.

3 Show the picture to the class, and focus on anything that is different from what they imagined.

You can use this technique with any picture, either from the Coursebook, a magazine or the internet. The aim is for learners to ask natural, realistic questions – so let them ask Yes/No or Wh- questions as appropriate.

