

Elementary. Q&A about the past with Be, Have & Other Verbs + Who/What = subject

Remember this: Notice the word order, the syntax, in these questions:

- **Are** you a student? (a yes/no question in the **present simple** with the subject in the 2nd person singular - notice "a student", "a" is only used in the singular, the plural of "a" is "some")
- When **were** you born? (a wh- question in the **past simple** of "to be (born)"; subject: 2nd person singular / plural = I was born / We were born)
- **Do you speak** English? (a yes/no question in the **present simple** of Other Verbs; subject: 2nd person singular / plural = ¿Habras / Habláis español?)
- **Did you have** a good time? (a yes/no question in the **past simple** of other verbs; subject: 2nd person singular / plural = ¿Te lo pasaste bien? / ¿Os lo pasasteis?)

Which is the **main verb** in each of the questions?

There are two kinds of verbs:

Auxiliaries (aux) are verbs that help the main verb. How? By saying something about the subject (which person it is) and by saying something about the tense (present simple, past simple, present cont....)

Main verbs (V) are verbs that name the action. You cannot visualize an auxiliary, you see nothing. But you can always visualize the main verb. For example, if I say, *Do you speak English?*, you cannot visualize "do", it's an auxiliary, it only tells us that it's a question in the present simple tense and that it is not the 3rd person singular! However, you can visualize "speak", you see someone speaking!

When the main verb is "to be", the pattern for the question is **Verb + Subject...?**

- **Are** you a student? (yes/no question with "to be" in the present simple)
- Where **were** you yesterday? (wh- question with "be" in the past simple; S: 2nd p. sing./plu.)
- **Is** she a doctor? (yes/no question with "be" in the present simple; S: 3rd p. sing.)
- When **was** he in your house? (wh- question with "be" in the past simple; S: 3rd p. sing.)

When the main verb is any **other verb**, the question goes **Aux + Subject + Verb...?**

- **Do you speak** English? (yes/no question with "speak" in the present simple; S: 2nd p. sing./plu.)
- **Does your mother work** here? (yes/no question with "work" in the present simple; S: 3rd p. sing.)
- Where **do you live**? (wh- question with "live" in the present simple; S: 2nd p. sing./plu.)
- When **does she get up**? (wh- question with "get up" in the present simple; S: 3rd p. sing.)
- **Did you find** your keys? (yes/no question with "find" in the present simple; S: 2nd p. sing./plu.)
- What **did you say**?
- Where **did she go** last Friday?

So...

- Questions with the Verb "be" follow this pattern: **V + S...? (inversion)**
- Questions with **Other Verbs** follow the pattern **Aux + S + V...?**

Remember: in the Simple Tenses (present & past simple) the **aux** is "do" (in the present, *do, does*; in the past, *did*) and the **V** is in the **bare infinitive**. (There are 2 exceptions I will tell you about later on.)

- Did you go out last Saturday? Yes, I did.
- Where did you go? I went to the cinema.
- Who did you go with? I went with my friend Lorna.
- What did you see? We saw the latest Julio Medem movie.
- Did you like it? Yes, I did. It was a good movie.
- Did your friend like it? No, she didn't. She didn't understand it.
- What did you do after that? We went out for a drink.
- Where did you go? We went to a nice pub in the city centre. We wanted to try its cocktails.
- What did you have? I had a piña colada.
- What did your friend have? She had a mojito.
- Were the cocktails good? Yes, they were! They were very good!
- Was it expensive? Yes, it was! It was very expensive!
- Or Were they expensive? Yes, they were! They were very expensive!
- Did you have a good time? Yes, I did. It was a very nice evening.

The Talking People Podcast. Useful Language for Elementary students
Questions & Answers with "be", "have" and other verbs. "Who" and "what" as subjects

- Where did you go on holiday last summer?
- We went to Italy.
- How did you get there?
- We flew.
- How long was the flight?
- It was short. About two hours.
- Where did you stay?
- We stayed at a lovely hotel. It wasn't expensive.
- What did you do?
- We visited all the tourist sights. We also visited two museums.
- Did you buy any souvenirs?
- I did. I got/bought a T-shirt for my little/younger brother and a Romeo and Juliet souvenir for my big/older/elder brother.
- How long were you in Italy?
- You mean, how long did we stay in all? Well, we spent there a whole week. We were always busy and tired but it was wonderful. We saw interesting things, and we met interesting people. We learned/learnt a lot! I love traveling/travelling! And I loved that trip to Italy!
- Did you have any problems?
- Well, not really. The usual for tourists - we got up too early every day and there were a lot of tourists everywhere!

The two **exceptions** I mentioned before are these:

With "Who" and "What" as the **subject** of the question, as in "Who called?" and as in "What happened?" In this case, the Subject has to come first, of course, so the verb takes the form it takes in statements (not questions), whether + or - . My advice is you start by learning this by ear:

- What **'s happening?** (What-subject with a present continuous)
- What **happened** (the day of your birthday / the other day / then)? (What-subject referring to a past event?)
- Who **called?** (it's the afternoon and you are referring to this morning)
- Who **said** that?! (subject: who)
- Compare with: What **did you say?** (subject: you)
- Who **saw** that? (subject: who)
- Who **did you see?** (subject: you)

The second **exception** relates to the verb "have". When "to have" indicates **possession**, in British English it follows the syntax of "be" as a main verb:

- **Inversion:** **Have** you got any brothers and sisters? (UK)
- **Aux+S+V:** **Do you have** any siblings? (US)
- What have you got there? (UK) Oh, it's nothing. Just my mobile phone.
- What do you have there? (US) Oh, it's nothing. Just my cellphone.

But when the verb "have" has **other meanings**, it operates like all the other verbs, in terms of syntax or word order:

- What time **do you have** breakfast? (present simple)
- What time **did you have** lunch that day? (past simple)

Remember that "have" has a lot of meanings!:

- **To have** **a** shower, to have a bath, to have a shave, to have a drink, to have something to eat, to have a nap/siesta, to have a cigarette, to have a meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner)
- **To have** breakfast / to have lunch / to have dinner/supper = the meals

But

- **To have** **a** good/light breakfast / lunch / dinner/supper