

English Grammar – Interrogative Pronouns

Look at these questions. What is different about the last question?

- Where did your wife eat? In Pizza Hut.
- When did your wife eat? On Saturday evening.
- What did your wife eat? Pepperoni Pizza.
- Who did Gabriel serve? My wife.
- Who served your wife? Gabriel.

The last question doesn't have an auxiliary verb! In this case, the word "who" acts as an "**interrogative pronoun**". This is a pronoun which is used to ask a question. Like other pronouns, they replace nouns in sentences. In the case of interrogative pronouns, they typically take the place of the subject of the question. For example, the word "who" in the question "Who is here?" replaces the subject, for example "Peter is here." Every interrogative pronoun is therefore the subject of the question and the subject of the response. A question which uses an interrogative pronoun must follow the "subject-verb" order (like an affirmation) and doesn't use an auxiliary verb.

Take a look at these examples:

- "Who" as a subject: "Who opened the door?" (*"who" is an "interrogative pronoun"*)
Response: "Peter opened the door."
- "Who" as an object: "Who did you see?" (*"who" is simply a question*)
Response: "I saw John."
- "What" as a subject: "What fell on the floor?" (*"what" is an "interrogative pronoun"*)
Response: "An egg fell on the floor."
- "What" as an object: "What did the egg fall on?" (*"what" is simply a question*)
Response: "The egg fell on the carpet."

The questions "**who**", "**which**", "**what**", "**whose**" and "**how many**" can be used as the "subject" of a question and therefore can act as "interrogative pronouns". Here are some examples. Note that the questions and responses have the same structure:

- **Who** served your wife? **Gabriel** served my wife.
- **Which** came first, the chicken or the egg? **The egg** came first!
- **What** looks good on Jane? **A long dress** looks good on Jane.
- **Whose phone** is broken? **Jim's phone** is broken.
- **How many students** passed the test? **Twenty students** passed the test.

However, when a question word is used as the "object" of a question, then it is simply a "question", and in these cases, we must use an auxiliary verb. For example:

- **Who** did Gabriel serve? Gabriel served **my wife**.
- **Which** do you think came first? I think **the egg** came first.
- **What** does she prefer? She prefers **a long dress**.
- **Whose phone** do you like? I like **Fred's phone**.
- **How many students** did you see? I saw **twenty students**.

Interrogative pronouns can be singular or plural:

- Who is this man? / Who are these men?
- Which is your car? / Which are your cars?
- What is your favourite colour? / What are your favourite colours?
- Whose is this book? / Whose are these books?

A: In English, questions always need an auxiliary verb!

B: Who said that?

Interrogative Adjectives

An interrogative adjective is an adjective that modifies a noun or pronoun in order to ask a question. Similarly to interrogative pronouns, we don't use an auxiliary verb in the question. For example:

Which won the game? (“which” is an “interrogative pronoun”)

Which team won the game? (“which” is an “interrogative adjective”)

There are three interrogative adjectives. They are:

- 1. What** Examples: **What animal** destroyed the tree?
What nationality speaks Welsh?
- 2. Which** Examples: **Which team** wins the most matches?
Which movie terrifies you most?
- 3. Whose** Examples: **Whose lunch** smells best?
Whose phone works fastest?

Interrogative adjectives can also be used in the middle of sentences. For example:

- I wonder **what colour** suits her best.
- I would like to know **which bag** weighs more.
- He asked me **whose car** pollutes less.

Exercise. For each answer, write a question using the given words.

Example:

Susan likes sushi. (*who*) --> Who likes sushi?

Susan likes sushi. (*what*) --> What does Susan like?

1a. John goes to work every day. (*who*) _____

1b. John goes to work by bus. (*how*) _____

2a. The TV needs to be repaired. (*what*) _____

2b. David repaired the TV. (*what*) _____

3a. Mike's phone looks nice. (*whose phone*) _____

3b. John borrowed Mike's phone. (*whose phone*) _____

4a. The blue chair looks broken. (*which chair*) _____

4b. Bob wants the blue chair. (*which chair*) _____

More practise: <https://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/exercises/questions/form.htm>