
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Grammar

Subject questions



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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Grammar with me, Rob.

Catherine

And me, Catherine. Hello.

Rob

Hello. In this programme we're talking about subject questions. We'll show you what they are, and how to make them...

Catherine

And we'll have a quiz to test what you've learnt...

Rob

And we'll finish with a top pronunciation tip.

Catherine

So, let's get started. In everyday English, the words **who**, **what**, **which** and **whose** are very common in questions. Here's Neil, hello Neil.

Neil

Hello Catherine.

Catherine

With an example:

Neil

Who did David meet?

Rob

Thanks Neil. Now the answer could be:

Neil

David met Victoria.

Catherine

Subject: David; verb: met; object: Victoria. So Victoria is the *object* of the verb met.

Rob

So in the question **Who did David meet?** The word **who** is asking about the **object**.

Catherine

But we can also use question words to ask about the **subject**, like this:

Neil

Who lives in The White House?

Catherine

OK, so we have a question word: who, plus a verb: lives. And it's a **subject question** because it asks who is **doing** the verb. **Who lives in The White House?**

Rob

Now we don't use **do**, **does** or **did** in subject questions. We don't say **Who does live** – it's just **Who lives**. So Catherine **Who lives in the White House?**

Catherine

Tough one Rob. I think it's the US president.

Rob

Yes, correct.

Catherine

Let's have another one please.

Neil

What makes you happy?

Catherine

What makes me happy? Knitting actually makes me happy! So this question word is **what**. **What** is the subject, and the verb is **makes**. Rob, what makes you happy?

Rob

It's got to be riding my bike, I think. So that's **who** to ask about people, and **what** for things.

Catherine

Exactly. Now, can we have another one please Neil?

Neil

Which key opens this door?

Catherine

So, the question word **which** usually comes with a **noun**. For example: which key. **Rob, which key opens this door?**

Rob

The smallest key opens this door. We use **which** when the choice of possible answers is limited, like which key, or which day, or which colour.

Catherine

And what if the choice of possible answers **isn't** limited?

Rob

Well, then we use **what** without a noun.

Neil

What happened last night? What caused the accident?

IDENT

You're listening to BBC Learning English.

Rob

And we're looking at subject questions. Neil, can we have one more subject question word please?

Neil

Whose story won first prize?

Rob

The word whose shows that something **belongs** to someone, and it usually comes with a noun, so: whose story is the subject; the verb is won. **Whose story won first prize?**

Catherine

And now: a pronunciation warning. In spoken English, the words **who is** and the words **who has** are often shortened to:

Both

Who's!!!

Catherine

That's right: it sounds exactly the same as the question word **whose**. **Who's - whose**.

Rob

It's confusing, isn't it? So here's a little tip for you. If you remember that the question word **whose** usually comes with a noun, you should be able to tell the difference. Here's Neil with two questions - but only one of them has a noun after the word **whose**. See if you can tell which one:

Neil

*Who's using my mobile phone? **Whose** mobile phone has a signal?*

Rob

Did you get that? The second question had **whose** plus a **noun** so that means it's a **subject question: **Whose mobile phone has a signal?****

Catherine

Top tip Rob. So now we have four words we can use for **subject questions: who, which, what, and whose**.

Rob

Do you know what, I think that means: it's quiz time.

Catherine

And you're right, it is Rob. But actually, today we're doing a backwards quiz: I'll say the answer, and you at home have to work out what the subject question is. Here's the first answer: *Keiko speaks Japanese*.

Rob

So, the **subject** is Keiko – that's a person. It's **who** for people, so the question is **Who speaks Japanese?**

Catherine

Exactly. Here's another answer: *Kate's dog won the competition*.

Rob

So it's **whose** because the dog belongs to Kate. With **whose** we need the noun dog, so: **Whose dog won the competition?**

Catherine

Right, very good. And Kate's dog is a clever dog! No doubt about it. Right, last one: **The shop on the corner sells gloves**.

Rob

So it's **which** with shop because we're asking about a thing - and we can suppose there's a limited choice of shops in the area – so: **Which shop sells gloves?**

Catherine

So that's **subject questions**. They don't need the auxiliary **do, does** or **did**...

Rob

...but they all start with a question word. Just remember to choose the right one!

Catherine

There's more about this on our website at www.bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Grammar.

Both

Bye.