58. Asking questions - *yes* / *no* questions

1   Formation
There are three main ways of forming questions requiring a "yes" or "no" answer:
- rising intonation / ending with a question mark
- using *est-ce que* (in less formal language)
- inverting the subject and verb (in more formal language)

2   Rising intonation / ending with a question mark
The easiest way of forming a question in French is to take a normal affirmative statement and (if you are speaking) raise the intonation towards the end of the sentence or (if you are writing) put a question mark at the end. This is common in informal speech and writing:

> Vous connaissez Pierre?
> *Do you know Pierre?*

3   *Est-ce que*
Another way of forming a question is to take a normal affirmative statement and place *est-ce que* in front of it. This is used in all forms of language except very formal French:

> Est-ce que vous connaissez Pierre?
> *Do you know Pierre?*

4   Inversion
4.1   Pronoun as subject
In written or formal spoken French questions are formed by inversion. In simple tenses (like the present), if the subject of the sentence is a personal pronoun (like *je* or *vous*) the subject and verb are inverted and linked by a hyphen:

> **Connaissez-vous** Pierre? - *Do you know Pierre?*

In compound tenses (like the perfect) it is the subject and auxiliary that are inverted:

> **Avez-vous** connu Pierre? - *Did you know Pierre?*

Note the following:
- *-t-* is inserted when the verb ends with a vowel (even if this latter vowel is not pronounced). For example:
  > Parle-**t**-elle souvent de sa mère? - *Does she often talk of her mother?*
  > A-**t**-il eu besoin de quelque chose? - *Did he need anything?*

- *Puis* is used instead of *peux* in inversion (*je* form only):
  > **Puis**-je me servir? - *May I help myself?*

4.2   Inversion with noun as subject

Where the subject of the sentence is a noun, the sentence is given **two subjects**, the noun itself, which precedes the verb, and the corresponding subject pronoun which follows the verb:

> **Mr Chirac** visite-**il** souvent cette région?
> *Does Mr Chirac often visit this region?*
> **Le gouvernement** a-t-**il** pu réduire le taux de chômage?
> *Has the government been able to reduce unemployment?*

5   *Si*

Note that *si* means *yes* in answer to a negative question:

> - Pierre n'est pas là par hasard? - **Si**, Pierre est là
> *- Pierre isn't here by any chance? - Yes, Pierre is here*