

## 59. Asking questions (2) - information questions

### 1 Question words

Information questions ask for some sort of information beyond a *yes* or *no*. They are formed using one of the following question words:

qui?	<i>who?</i>	où?	<i>where</i>
que?	<i>what?</i>	quand?	<i>when?</i>
quoi?	<i>what?</i>	pourquoi?	<i>why?</i>
à qui?	<i>whose?</i>	comment?	<i>how?</i>
lequel / quel	<i>which? / what?</i>	combien?	<i>how many?</i>

As with questions requiring a "yes" or "no" answer, information questions can be formed in three fundamental ways: rising intonation / ending with a question mark; using *est-ce que* (in less formal language); and inverting the subject and verb (in more formal language).

### 2 Rising intonation / ending with a question mark

To form a question in this way take a normal affirmative statement and use a question word in the place of the information required. 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:

Vos parents ont invité **qui**?  
*Who did they / your parents invite?*  
Tu vas t'y rendre **comment**?  
*How are you going to get there?*  
Le professeur arrivera **quand**?  
*When will the teacher arrive?*

### 3 *Est-ce que* and inversion

In questions involving *est-ce que* and inversion of subject and verb, the question word comes at the front of the sentence. *Est-ce que* questions are used in all forms of language except very formal French, and are formed by using one of the question words listed in section 1 above, followed by *est-ce que* (or *est-ce qui* if the question word acts as a subject), followed by the usual word order:

**Quand est-ce que** le professeur arrivera?  
*When will the teacher arrive?*

Questions involving inversion are reserved for written or formal spoken French, and are formed by using one of the question words, followed by inversion of subject and verb. Where the subject is a noun the sentence is given two subjects as described in section 4.2 of the previous unit:

**Quand** arrivera-t-il / le professeur arrivera-t-il?  
*When will he / the teacher arrive?*

It is often possible to omit the extra subject:

**Quand** arrivera le professeur?  
*When will the teacher arrive?*

### 3.1 Expressing *who*?

**Qui est-ce qui** veut du thé? / **Qui** veut du thé?

*Who wants some tea?*

**Qui est-ce que** vos parents ont invité? **Qui** vos parents ont-ils invité?

*Who did your parents invite?*

**A qui est-ce que** le professeur a parlé? / **A qui** le professeur a-t-il parlé?

*Who did the teacher talk to?*

### 3.2 Expressing *what*?

**Qu'est-ce qui** a causé l'accident? [NB - *que* cannot be used on its own here]

*What caused the accident?*

**Qu'est-ce que** le professeur vous a dit? **Que** vous a dit le professeur?

*What did the teacher say to you?*

**A quoi est-ce que** tu penses? **A quoi** penses-tu?

*What are you thinking about?*

### 3.3 Expressing *whose*?

**A qui** est ce livre? [often adapted to *C'est à qui ce livre?* in spoken French]

*Whose book is this?*

### 3.4 Expressing *which (one)? / what?*

These are generally expressed by *lequel, laquelle*, or *quel, quelle* (before *être*):

**Laquelle** des deux robes a-t-elle préférée?

*Which of the two dresses did she / your sister prefer?*

**Quelles** sont les différences entre les deux produits?

*What are the differences between the two products?*

### 3.5 Expressing *which [+ noun]? what [+ noun]?*

This is expressed by *quel?* or its derivatives:

**Quels** conseils votre frère vous a-t-il donnés?

**Quels conseils est-ce que** votre frère vous a donnés?

*What advice did your brother give you?*

### 3.6 Expressing *where? when? why? how? how many?*

These are expressed by *où? quand? pourquoi? comment? combien?*

**Où est-ce que** tu vas? / **Où** vas-tu?

*Where are you going?*

**Quand est-ce que** le professeur arrivera? / **Quand** le professeur arrivera-t-il?

*When will the teacher arrive?*

**Pourquoi est-ce qu'**il est en retard? / **Pourquoi** est-il en retard?

*Why is he late?*

**Comment est-ce que** tu vas t'y rendre? / **Comment** vas-tu t'y rendre?

*How are you going to get there?*

**Combien** de cadeaux **est-ce que** tu as reçus? / **Combien** de cadeaux **as-tu** reçus?

*How many presents did you receive?*