Indirect Questions

What are Indirect Questions?

Direct questions are the "normal" questions that we can ask to friends, family members, and people who we know well.

Example of a direct question:

"Where's the bathroom?"

Indirect questions are a little more formal and polite. We use them when talking to a person we don't know very well, or in professional situations, and their form is a little different.

Example of an indirect question:

"Could you tell me where the bathroom is?"

Phrases for Indirect Questions

- Could you tell me...
- Do you know...
- I was wondering...
- Do you have any idea...
- I'd like to know...
- Would it be possible...
- Is there any chance...

Direct and Indirect Questions in English: Examples

Direct: Where is Market Street?

Indirect: Could you tell me where Market Street is?

Indirect Questions

In indirect questions with is/are, the verb (is) comes *after* the subject (Market Street).

Direct What time does the bank open?

Indirect: Do you know what time the bank opens?

In indirect questions, we don't use the auxiliary verbs do/does/did. Also, you can see that the verb is "open" in the direct question, and "opens" in the indirect question.

Direct: Why did you move to Europe?

Indirect: I was wondering why you moved to Europe.

Again, there is no auxiliary verb did in the indirect question. In fact, this indirect question isn't even a question – it's more of a statement that invites the other person to give more information.

Direct: How has he managed to get in shape so quickly?

Indirect: Do you have any idea how he's managed to get in shape so quickly?

The auxiliary verbs have and has can be used in both the direct and indirect questions – but in the direct question, "has" comes *before* the subject (he), and in the indirect question, "has" comes *after* the subject.

Direct: How much does this motorcycle cost?

Indirect Questions

Indirect: I'd like to know how much this motorcycle costs.

To form the indirect question, remove does and change "cost" to "costs."

Direct: Can you finish the project by tomorrow?

Indirect: Would it be possible for you to finish the project by tomorrow?

For direct questions with can, we can use the phrase "would it be possible…" to make it indirect.

Direct: Can we change the meeting to Thursday?

Indirect: Is there any chance we could change the meeting to Thursday?

"Is there any chance…" is another option for forming indirect questions with can.

Yes/No Direct Questions –> "If" in Indirect Questions

If the direct question is a "yes or no" question (it has no question word such as what, who, when, where, why, or how), then the indirect question will have if.

Indirect Questions

Direct: Does Tom like Italian food?

Indirect: Do you know if Tom likes Italian food?

Direct: Are your parents joining us for dinner?

Indirect: Could you tell me if your parents are joining us for dinner?

Direct: Do they speak English?

Indirect: I was wondering if they speak English.

Direct: Has Barbara ever studied abroad?

Indirect: Do you have any idea if Barbara's ever studied abroad?

Direct: Do you plan on traveling this summer?

Indirect: I'd like to know if you plan on traveling this summer.