

QUESTIONS AND QUESTION MARKS

The point of a direct question is to find something out, and a question mark tells the reader so.

DIRECT QUESTION Are you going to the party?
DIRECT QUESTION Who is going to the party with you?

The point of a statement, by contrast, is to say that something happened, is happening, or is going to happen. There's no doubt about it, so there's no question mark.

STATEMENT Alice wanted to know the answer.

Some kinds of direct questions can be combined with ordinary statements because the original question does not reverse usual English word order or refer to specific times or people in ways that conflict with the rest of the statement. In these cases, the original question typically begins with a question word: **who, what, when, where, why**, or **how**. These combinations are statements, so they always end with periods, not question marks.

DIRECT QUESTION Who wrote *Moby Dick*?
STATEMENT Chelsea asked who wrote *Moby Dick*.
STATEMENT Chelsea asked where the book was.

Often, however, statements and direct questions don't mix. When a direct question doesn't mix with a statement, it's usually because

The word order is different. In statements the verbs always come after the subjects that are doing them. In some direct questions, however, the verbs come before the subjects; sometimes, they put a helping verb like *did* or *have* before the subject. Those questions can't be mixed with regular statements.

STATEMENT	Brandon was in my calculus class. s v
DIRECT QUESTION	Was Brandon in your calculus class? v s
MIXED (WRONG)	Sam wanted to know was Brandon in my calculus class. v v s
STATEMENT	Kaley took the final. s v
DIRECT QUESTION	Did Kaley take the final? v s v
MIXED (WRONG)	Eric asked did Kaley take the final. v v s v

The verb tense or pronouns are different. Many original questions refer to a present or future time even though the rest of your sentence is written in the past. Many also use pronouns like **I, you, and she** in ways that don't match the rest of your sentence or paper.

DIRECT QUESTION "Who was driving **your** car?"
STATEMENT Eric was driving **my** car. (The writer's car.)

MIXED (WRONG)	Tricia asked who was driving your car. (The reader's car?)
DIRECT QUESTION	Who is studying for the test tonight ?
STATEMENT	C.J. is studying for the test tonight .
MIXED (WRONG)	Madison asked who is studying for the test tonight . (The studying and the night are both in the past when the sentence is written)

If you want to combine a statement and one of these questions in the same sentence, you can either:

Present the question as an exact quotation, so the statement just identifies the speaker:

MIXED (WRONG)	<u>Sammy asked</u> <u>what was the answer.</u> <i>statement</i> <i>unquoted direct question</i>
OK	<u>Sammy asked, "What was the answer?"</u> <i>statement</i> <i>quoted direct question</i>

Reword the question into an indirect question. Indirect questions always end with periods—never question marks. You can create an indirect question by

Changing the word order and adding "if" or "whether." If the original question put the verb before the subject, reverse them. Your new sentence will be a statement: the subject comes before the verb.

DIRECT QUESTION	Was Angela late for class? v s
STATEMENT	Angela was late for class. s v
MIXED (WRONG)	Chelsea wondered was Angela late for class. v s
OK: INDIRECT	Chelsea wondered if Angela was late for class. s v

Changing the pronouns and verb tense.

DIRECT QUESTION	Who is going to the party with you ?
DIRECT QUOTATION	Mom asked, "Who is going to the party with you ?"
MIXED (WRONG)	Mom asked who is going to the party with you .
OK: INDIRECT	Mom asked who was going to the party with me .

Does the question mark go inside or outside the quotation marks? It depends on how much—and what part—of your sentence is a question.

QUESTION

Who wrote the line, “’tis better to have loved and lost”?

The whole sentence is a question, so it ends with a question mark after the quotation. The quotation is actually **not** a question, so the question mark isn’t part of it.

STATEMENT

Justin asked Candace, “how do I open the box?”

The main sentence is a statement, not a question Justin asked Candace something. That means that there can’t be a question mark that applies to the sentence as a whole. The quotation, however, is a question, so the question mark is part of it. Since you can’t usually have a question mark and a period, this sentence ends after the closing quotation mark.

If, however, you’re using a parenthetical citation style like MLA, put the citation after the closing quotation mark and a period at the end.

Justin asked Candace, “how do I open the box?” (Wilcox 43).

■ Practice

Make any necessary corrections in the following sentences.

1. They want to know are you going to the movies.
2. She wondered “why does this always happen to me.”
3. Some critics think the story asks, “Can we love twice” (Smith 34)?
4. He said I need to know who is going to the store with me.
5. She will wonder did I do the homework.
6. We did believe he was telling the truth.
7. He asked would I be at the meeting.
8. My dad asked how are you getting there?
9. Tony wanted to know what did I think about the game.
10. Her motto is “If not me, then who? If not now, then when”?

■ Possible Answers

1. They want to know **if you are** going to the movies.
2. She wondered “why does this always happen to me?”
3. Some critics think the story asks, “Can we love twice?” (Smith 34).
4. He said, “I need to know who is going to the store with me.”
5. She will wonder **if I did** the homework.
6. We did believe he was telling the truth. (No change)
7. He asked **whether I would be** at the meeting.
8. My dad asked **how we were** getting there.
9. Tony wanted to know **what I thought** about the game.
10. Her motto is “If not me, then who? If not now, then when”?

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