



## Answers looking for a question

by Paul Walsh

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**Language:** Question forms

**Activity:** Finding questions to answers

**Level:** All levels

**Time:** 10-20 mins+

**Materials:** Whiteboard, pens, paper

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## Introduction

This lesson is materials-free for all levels and requires minimum preparation. All you need is a whiteboard. In this lesson learners 'tinker' with question forms - and learn features of Natural English such as 'being vague'.

Some of the questions used here are adapted from '[A Handbook of Spoken Grammar: Strategies for speaking natural English](#)' by Ken Paterson, Caroline Caygill and Rebecca Sewell, published by DELTA publishing.

## Procedure

1. Write some or all of these phrases on the whiteboard (right-hand side). I wrote down 5 phrases with my A2/ B1 group. These are the *answers* to the questions.

I know.  
Yes, I will.  
Not really, I prefer Lady Gaga.  
Yeah ok, sounds good.  
No, I can't I'm busy.  
There's nothing much on - just that new French film.  
I can't find my car keys anywhere.  
He's doing his homework or something.  
Kind of.  
6 o'clock, I'll get a taxi.

2) Say to learners "Sometimes English speakers talk in full sentences, but often we DON'T. Here are some answers to questions - some are short, some are longer. I want you to discuss what the questions might be, and write the questions down."

For higher levels you could ask them to think of two questions for each answer.

3) Learners feedback to the group. Teacher can board the learners' sentences and work on features of form, meaning or pronunciation.

4) If needed, Teacher then gives some 'model' answers:

A) This weather's awful, isn't it? B) I know. (**Agreement on something negative**)

A) Will you call him? B) Yes, I will. (**WILL for requests**)

A) Do you like Beyonce? B) Not really, I prefer Lady Gaga. (**NOT REALLY - Hedging/ Being polite**)



A) Do you want to go to that new bar? B) Yeh ok, it/ that sounds good. (**Ellipsis of 'it' or 'that'**)

A) Are you going out tonight? B) No, I can't I'm busy. (**Present Continuous for Future Arrangements**)

A) Is there anything on at the cinema/ pictures? B) There's nothing much on - just that new French film. (**Useful short phrase - 'What's on' for cinema/ radio/ tv/ theatre**)

A) What's wrong? B) I can't find my car keys anywhere. (**exaggerated language - use of 'anywhere' for emphasis**)

A) What's he doing? B) He's doing his homework or something. (**Being vague with 'something'**)

A) Is it raining outside? B) Kind of. (**Phrase 'kind of' for HEDGING**)

A) What time does your plane leave? B) At 6 o'clock, I'll get a taxi. (**ellipsis of preposition**)

That's it! You can use this exercise with any level, any context and it works a treat! For Business English learners you could use networking phrases, or arranging a meeting phrases e.g.

**Question:** How about next Tuesday? **Answer:** Sorry, I'm tied up all next week.

The focus should be on everyday, Natural English - which is something learners really struggle with.

## Follow up

Get the learners to write answers on the white board then everyone else (including the teacher) has to guess the questions. Make sure they know what the correct question is!

## Variation

Go to any spoken corpora and mine it for useful question and answer exchanges. Then use these exchanges to create a new form of 'Answers looking for a question'.

## Images

['More questions than answers'](#). Tom, from flickr. Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC 2.0).

