

SKILL 15: INVERT THE SUBJECT AND VERB WITH QUESTION WORDS

There is some confusion about when to invert the subject and verb after question words such as *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*. These words can have two very different functions in a sentence. First, they can introduce a question, and in this case the subject and verb that follow are inverted.

What is the homework?

When can I leave?

Where are you going?

Also, these words can join together two clauses, and in this case the subject and verb that follow are not inverted.

I do not know *what* the homework is.

When I can leave, I will take the first train.

Do you know *where* you are going?

In each of these examples there are two clauses joined by a question word. Notice that the subjects and verbs that follow the question words *what*, *when*, and *where* are not inverted in this case.

The following example shows how this sentence pattern could be tested in structure questions on the TOEFL test.

Example from the Paper and Computer TOEFL® Tests

The lawyer asked the client why _____ it.

- (A) did he do
- (B) did he
- (C) he did
- (D) did

In this example the question word *why* is used to connect the two clauses, so a subject and verb are needed after this connector; this is not a question, so the subject and verb should not be inverted. The best answer is therefore answer (C).

The following chart lists the question words and their sentence patterns:

INVERTED SUBJECTS AND VERBS WITH QUESTION WORDS					
<i>who</i>	<i>what</i>	<i>when</i>	<i>where</i>	<i>why</i>	<i>how</i>
When the question word introduces a question, the subject and verb <i>are</i> inverted.					
		(question word)		V S ?	
		What		are they?	
When the question word connects two clauses, the subject and verb that follow <i>are not</i> inverted.					
	S V		(question word)		S V.
	I know		what		they are.

EXERCISE 15: Each of the following sentences contains a question word. Circle the question words. Underline the subjects once and the verbs twice. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

- I 1. The phone company is not certain (when) will the new directories be ready.
- C 2. The professor does not understand (why) so many students did poorly on the exam.
- ___ 3. How new students can get information about parking?
- ___ 4. Where is it cheapest to get typeset copies printed?
- ___ 5. Only the pilot can tell you how far can the plane go on one tank of fuel.
- ___ 6. What type of security does he prefer for his investments?
- ___ 7. Not even the bank president knows when the vault will be opened.
- ___ 8. How long it has been since you arrived in the United States?
- ___ 9. The jury doubts what the witness said under cross-examination.
- ___ 10. Do you know why he wants to take an extended leave of absence?

SKILL 16: INVERT THE SUBJECT AND VERB WITH PLACE EXPRESSIONS

After ideas expressing place, the subject and the verb sometimes invert in English. This can happen with single words expressing place, such as *here*, *there*, or *nowhere*.

Here is the book that you lent me.

There are the keys that I thought I lost.

Nowhere have I seen such beautiful weather.