# Understanding Question Marks

**By the end of this lesson you should be able to:**

* Identify sentences that require question marks.
* Use question marks correctly.

**Introduction**

Question marks are a form of punctuation used to indicate that someone is asking something. You will recall from the lesson on ‘Types of sentences’ that question marks are included in all direct interrogative sentences. We place a question mark at the end of an interrogative sentence. The question mark differentiates a statement from a question.

Example 1: *Do you read the Cape Times?*

In the above example, because “do you read the Cape Times” asks for information, one has to place a question mark at the end.

Example 2: *What happened to the equality that the first democratic government promised South Africa?*

The above example shows that question marks come at the end of rhetorical questions too. Rhetorical questions are those which do not necessarily require an answer. Their purpose is rather to provoke thought on a particular topic. Rhetorical questions do not require answers but are still questions nonetheless.

For example, the statement

*“Can't you do anything right?”*

Asks a question, but does not necessarily require an answer. To reply to this question, “*Yes, I can do a number of things right, like study and sing etc.”* would further the underlying point of the rhetorical question, which is to insult the person to whom it is being asked.

NB: Question marks do not appear at the end of indirect questions. Indirect questions report questions, instead of ask them directly. Therefore, they are rather statements than questions. For example indirect questions do not make use of *who, what, when, why, where* or *how.* They replace these with pronouns or nouns. Look at the examples below to understand better:

Example 1: Many wondered if ever South Africa would become a democracy.

The question for the above sentence would be

*Will South Africa ever become a democracy?*

Rephrasing the question indirectly shows us how is asking the questions/doing the wondering in this regard: Many.

Example 2: The lecturer asked the students if they understood the course material.

The same thing is happening in the last example; the lecturer is asking the question. If this were to be written as a direct question, it would be as follows:

*Who understands the course material?*

**ACTIVITY 1**

**Using your knowledge of question marks, place a question mark at the end of the sentences that you think are questions. Note that not all of the sentences require question marks.**

1. Where is the office
2. Why did you not do your essay
3. According to the text, in what century did John Locke write his Second Treatise
4. It is out of the question that you will receive an extension
5. How does Hobbes’s views differ from those of Locke
6. It is possible for you to hand in a draft essay
7. Is realism a relative theory in explaining post-Cold War international relations
8. The exam is at 15h00
9. Define humanitarian intervention
10. Critically examine the arguments for and against humanitarian intervention

**ACTIVITY 2**

**Fill in the direct or indirect question out of the following sentences:**

Example:

Indirect Question: *The student asked if South Africa is fast-becoming a welfare state*.

Direct Question: *Is South Africa fast-becoming a welfare state?*

1. Indirect question: The student asked the lecturer what Weber’s three forms of legitimacy were.

Direct question: ………………………………………………………………………..

1. Indirect question: The student wondered ………………………………………...........

Direct question: Where did the negotiations take place?

1. The philosopher pondered ……………………………………………………………...

Direct question: Does society require a sovereign state?