

Playing a game of question tag

Written by 'Grammar Guy' By Curtis Honeycutt Guest Columnist
Friday, 11 August 2023 04:05



I don't know much about street art. I'm no graffitist (a person who does graffiti), but I do know that to "tag" something is when someone quickly spray paints a surface, or it can indicate how a graffiti artist signs his/her work. I know I'm breaking down basic graffiti terms mostly to win points with the Gen Z crowd. You can take that one to the Banksy!

I appreciate clothing companies that have stopped adding tags to their shirts. Instead of adding the tag, they print the size and washing instructions directly on the inside of the shirt. Just like that—no more back-of-the-neck irritation!

I'm glad someone finally figured that out. If there's a sartorial equivalent of the Nobel prize, we should track down the inventor of the tagless shirt and give them one.

When it comes to grammar and tags, I like "question tags." A question tag is a question added to the end of a sentence. This could either be to keep a conversation going, get someone to agree with us, or ask a question.

Here's an example: You don't think I can slam dunk a basketball, do you? He's trying to bring back the sleeveless turtleneck, isn't he?

Interestingly, if the initial statement is positive, the question tag is negative; conversely, when the initial statement is negative, the question tag is positive. You never learned the Macarena,

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did you? You put my stapler in Jell-O again, didn't you?

See how that works? Let me rephrase that: you see how that works, don't you?

The question tag uses the same verb if the initial statement uses an auxiliary verb (like do, be, or have) or a modal verb (like could, may, or shall). I couldn't win the presidential election next year, could I? He sure does like his long ties, doesn't he?

However, if the initial statement doesn't use an auxiliary or modal verb, simply use the verb "do." The Colts won the game on a last-second field goal, didn't they? Byron didn't buy another apocalypse shelter, did he?

Question tags are fun, aren't they? This is kind of like when you buy a new car—once you're aware of question tags, you'll notice them everywhere. It's kind of like a shirt with an itchy tag—it's annoying, isn't it?

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