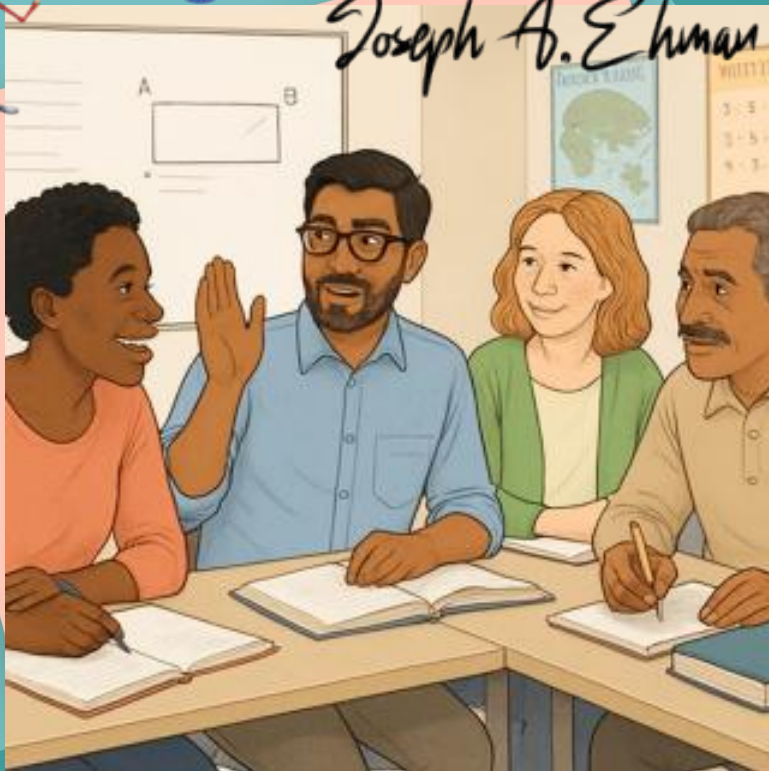Inglés con Joe
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CHALKie

Negative Statements, Positive Tags

Mastering English Question Tag Polarity for Fluency

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will:

- Understand how negative statements use positive tags in English.
- Avoid common double negative errors influenced by Spanish.
- Identify the correct auxiliary and subject for tags.
- Apply the rule to real-life conversations and writing.

Key Vocabulary

Polarity

Positive/negative statements: Grammar shows if something is denied or affirmed.

Clause

A group of words with a subject and a verb. It can be a full sentence or part of one.

Auxiliary

A helping verb (like do, have, be, can) used to form questions and negatives.

Tag

A short question at the end of a statement to check or confirm information.

The Standard Rule

Negative Statement → Positive Tag

When the main clause is negative, the question tag must be positive.

Example:

● She isn't ready, *is she?*

This is a key marker of fluent English. Using a negative tag after a negative statement is a classic learner error.

SUMMARY
QUESTION TAGS
IN ENGLISH

? **A QUESTION TAG** is a short question added to a statement to confirm or check information.

You like pizza, *don't you?*

✓ **CORE RULE: POLARITY**
• Positive statement ➡ Negative tag
• Negative statement ➡ Positive tag
She is a teacher, *isn't she?*

✲ **AUXILIARY VERBS**
The auxiliary (helping) verb in the main sentence is repeated in the tag.
He is working, *isn't he?*
They have finished, *haven't they?*

✓ **MODAL VERBS**
When a modal verb appears, it is used in the tag.
You can swim, *can't you?*
We should go, *shouldn't we?*

★ **SPECIAL CASES**

Why Does Polarity Flip?

The tag acts like a confirmation check.

If the main clause is negative, the tag flips to positive to seek agreement.

Example:

He didn't come, *did he?*

A double negative in English sounds illogical and confusing.

English vs. Spanish

Spanish Allows Double Negatives

In Spanish, both the clause and the tag can be negative: *No vino, ¿no?*

English Requires One Negative

In English, only ONE negative is allowed between the clause and the tag. Double negatives are not standard and sound confusing to native speakers.

Now, let's compare with Spanish. In Spanish, you can use a double negative, like "Él no vino, ¿no?" That feels natural in Spanish. But in English, only one negative is allowed.

So remember:

❌ She didn't eat, didn't she?

✅ She didn't eat, did she?

Step-by-Step: Making a Tag

1

Find Auxiliary
Identify the auxiliary verb in the main clause (like don't, can't, haven't).

2

Check Polarity
If the clause is negative, the tag must be positive.

3

Repeat Subject
Use the same subject in the tag as in the main clause.

4

Form the Tag
Combine auxiliary and subject to create the positive tag.

Examples in Action

Correct Tag Polarity

- They aren't coming tonight, *are they*?
- He didn't finish his homework, *did he*?
- We haven't met before, *have we?*
- She can't drive, *can she*?
- You won't forget, *will you?*

Notice how each negative clause is followed by a positive tag.

Positive Tags Practice

Question 1:

What kind of tag (positive or negative) should follow a negative statement in English?

Question 2:

The sentence 'You aren't from around here, aren't you?' contains a common error. What is the correct positive tag for this statement?

Question 3:

Complete the following statement with the correct positive tag: 'She doesn't speak French, _____?'

Positive Tags Practice

Answer 1:

A positive tag should always follow a negative statement in English to avoid double negatives.

Answer 2:

The correct positive tag is 'are you?', making the sentence 'You aren't from around here, are you?'
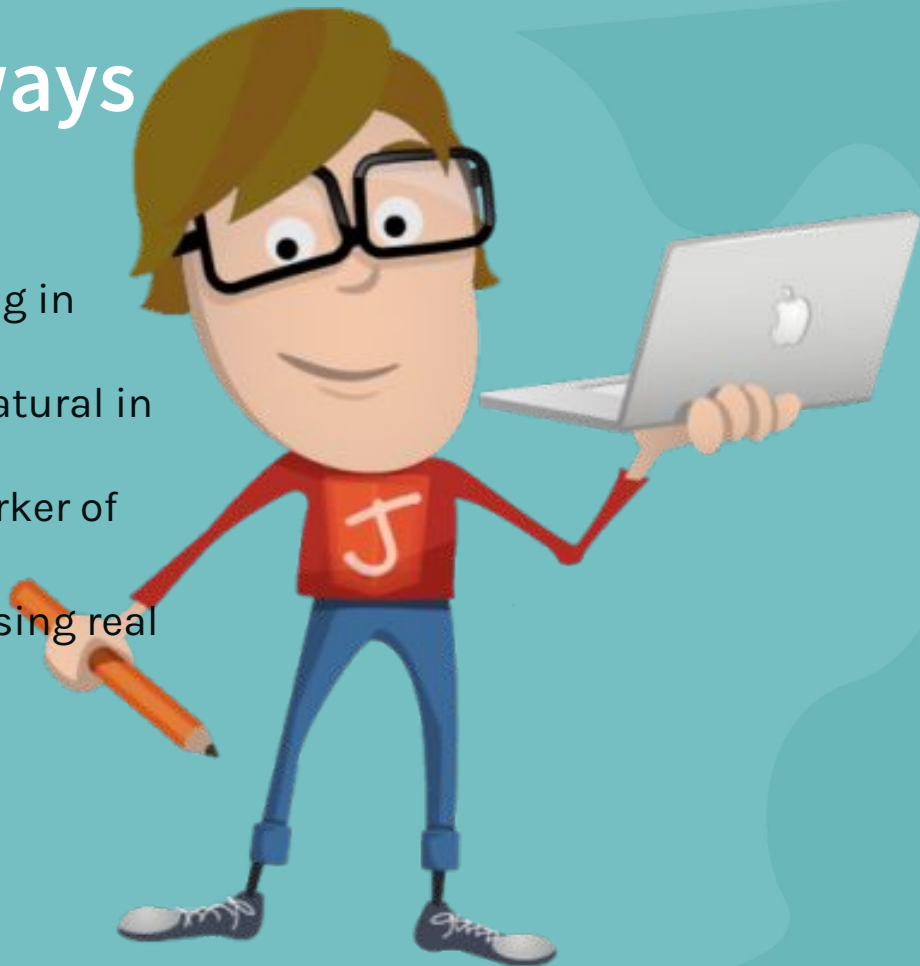
Answer 3:

The correct positive tag is 'does she?', completing the statement as 'She doesn't speak French, does she?'

Summary: Key Takeaways

Remember!

- Negative clause → Positive tag
- Only one negative between clause and tag in English
- Avoid double negatives, even if it feels natural in Spanish
- Using the right polarity is a powerful marker of fluency

Practice makes perfect—keep listening and using real English!

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