

Asking or Telling? Spotting Question Marks in Year 1

Key points

- A statement ('telling' sentence) shares information, while a question asks for it, and English marks the difference with punctuation.
- A question ends with a question mark ('?'), a curly punctuation mark that shows the reader to expect an answer.
- Many questions begin with a recognisable word, such as 'What', 'Why', 'Who', 'Where', 'When' or 'How'.
- Saying a question aloud often sounds different from a statement, with the voice tending to rise near the end.
- In Year 1 (children aged 5 to 6), teachers build on what children already know about full stops and capital letters by introducing the question mark next.
- Sorting example sentences into 'asking' and 'telling' piles before adding punctuation is a common, playful classroom activity for this skill.

Things to try at home

- In everyday chat, take turns making up a silly statement and a silly question about something you can both see, and ask your child to say which is which.
- While reading a favourite story together, ask your child to spot any question marks on the page and guess who might be asking.
- Say a few simple sentences aloud and play a quick 'asking or telling?' game, encouraging your child to listen for any rise in your voice.
- Leave a note or list with a mix of statements and questions and see if your child can spot the question marks.
- When your child asks you something, trace the question mark shape in the air together as a light, fun way of noticing it.

Find out more

- Your child's teacher, who can explain how this is being taught in class and how your child is getting on.
- GOV.UK: 'National curriculum in England: English programmes of study', which sets out what children are expected to learn about punctuation in Year 1.
- GOV.UK / Department for Education guidance on the primary English curriculum.