# **Rhetorical Questions for English Learners**

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Rhetorical questions can be defined as questions that are not really meant to be answered. Rather, rhetorical questions are asked in order to make a point about a situation or to point out something for consideration. This is a very different usage than yes/no questions or information questions. Let's quickly review these two basic types before moving on to rhetorical questions.

[Yes/No questions](https://www.thoughtco.com/yes-no-question-grammar-1692617) are used to quickly get an answer to a simple question. They are usually answered with the short response using only the auxiliary verb. For example:

**How to Ask Simple Questions in English**

*Would you like to come with us tonight?  
Yes, I would.*

*Did you understand the question?  
No, I didn't.*

*Are they watching TV at the moment?  
Yes, they are.*

[Information questions](https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-ask-questions-in-english-1211981) are asked using the following question words:

* *Where*
* *What*
* *When / What time*
* *Which*
* *Why*
* *How many / much / often / far / etc.*

Information questions are answered in full sentences. For example:

*Where do you live?  
I live in Portland, Oregon.*

*What time does the movie start?  
The movie starts at 7:30.*

*How far is it to the next gas station?  
The next gas station is in 20 miles.*

**Rhetorical Questions for the Big Questions in Life**

Rhetorical questions pose a question that is intended to make people think. For example, a conversation might begin with:

*What do you want to do in life? That's a question we all need to answer, but it's not easy...*

*How much time does it take to become successful? That's an easy question. It takes a lot of time! Let's take a look at what success requires so that we can get a better understanding.*

*Where do you want to be in 15 years? That's a question that everyone should take seriously no matter how old they are.*

**Rhetorical Questions to Draw Attention**

Rhetorical questions are also used to point to something important and often have an implied meaning. In other words, the person who poses the question is not looking for an answer ​but wants to make a statement. Here are some examples:

*Do you know what time it is?* - MEANING: It's late.  
*Who is my favorite person in the world?* - MEANING: You are my favorite person.  
*Where's my homework?* - MEANING: I expected you to turn in the homework today.  
*What does it matter?* - MEANING: It doesn't matter.

**Rhetorical Questions to Point Out a Bad Situation**

Rhetorical questions are also often used to complain about a bad situation. Once again, the actual meaning of the quite different than the rhetorical question. Here are some examples:

*What can she do about that teacher?*- MEANING: She can't do anything. Unfortunately, the teacher isn't very helpful.  
*Where am I going to find help this late in the day?* - MEANING: I'm not going to find help this late in the day.  
*Do you think I'm rich?* - MEANING: I'm not rich, don't ask me for money.

**Rhetorical Questions to Express a Bad Mood**

Rhetorical questions are often used to express a bad mood, even depression. For example:

*Why should I try to get that job?* - MEANING: I'll never get that job!  
*What's the point in trying?* - MEANING: I'm depressed and I don't want to make an effort.  
*Where did I go wrong?* - MEANING: I don't understand why I'm having so many difficulties lately.

**Negative Yes/No Rhetorical Questions to Point to a Positive**

Negative rhetorical questions are used to suggest that a situation is actually positive. Here are some examples:

*Haven't you had enough awards this year?* - MEANING: You've won a lot of awards. Congratulations!  
*Didn't I help you on your last exam?* - MEANING: I helped you on your last exam.  
*Won't he be excited to see you?* - MEANING: He will be very excited to see you.

Hopefully this short guide to rhetorical questions has answered any questions you may have on how and why we use them. There are other types such as [question tags](https://www.thoughtco.com/question-tags-in-english-1210692) to confirm information and [indirect questions](https://www.thoughtco.com/indirect-questions-1210671) to be more polite.