Embedded Questions (Wh- and Yes/No Question Clauses)

Sometimes we want to use a question as part of another question or a statement. This is called an embedded question.

1. We can use embedded questions as part of other questions. This is sometimes called an indirect question and is often used to be polite.

- Normal question: Where is the station?
- Indirect question (that includes an embedded question): Could you tell me where the station is?

See my page about indirect questions for more information.

2. We can also use embedded questions as part of statements. The embedded question is a noun clause and can be used in a similar way to a noun. For example, we can use it as the subject or the object of the main clause.

- Normal question: Where does she work?
- Embedded question in a statement: I don't know where she works. (Here 'where she works' is the object.)

- Normal question: Where does she work?
- Embedded question in a statement: Where she works is very far. (Here 'where she works' is the subject.)

Forming embedded questions

We use the same rules with embedded questions in statements as we do with embedded questions in indirect questions.

- If there is a question word, we keep it.
- If there is no question word, we use 'if' or 'whether'.
- We use normal sentence grammar (so we don't need 'do / does / did').
- We use normal sentence word order (subject + verb, not the opposite).
- We use a full stop and not a question mark at the end of the sentence.

Here are some examples of verbs that we often use with embedded questions:

wonder	I wonder why she said that.
know	They don't know what they're doing.
remember	We don't remember where the house is.
be sure	I'm not sure when we're going to arrive.
find out	Let's find out what time the show starts.
think about	She's thinking about how she's going to do it.
forget	I've forgotten why I started this.

Subject questions

If you start with a subject question, you don't need to change the grammar much, because it is already similar to a statement.

- Normal subject question: Who loves Julie?
- Embedded subject question: I don't know who loves Julie.

- Normal subject question: What happened?
- Embedded subject question: We are trying to find out what happened.