

3. Language Notes: Asking and answering questions in Chinese

Chinese, Part 4: Talking about your family

A very common kind of question to ask is one with a YES or NO answer. But in Chinese, there is no one word for YES or NO. Let's look at some ways of answering:

Question	YES answer	NO answer
Nǐ shì lǎo dà ma? 你是老大吗? Are you the eldest?	Shì de. 是的。 I am.	Bù shì. 不是。 I'm not.
Nǐ qù tā jiā ma? 你去他家吗? Are you going to his house?	Qù. 去。 I am going.	Bù qù. 不去。 I'm not going.
Nǐ yǒu yí gè gē ge ma? 你有一个哥哥吗? Do you have an older brother?	Yǒu. 有。 I have.	Méi yǒu. 没有。 I don't have [one].
<i>The question depends on the verb: shì, qù, yǒu.</i>	<i>To answer YES, simply repeat the verb. The particle de can be added for emphasis.</i>	<i>To answer NO, put a bù in front of the verb. If the verb is yǒu, put méi in front.</i>

There are different ways of asking questions with YES/NO answers:

1. By adding **ma** 吗 to the end of a statement:

Question	YES answer	NO answer
Nǐ shì lǎo dà <u>ma</u> ? 你是老大吗? Are you the eldest?	Shì de. 是的。 I am.	Bù shì. 不是。 I'm not.

2. By adding a "tag" to the end of the statement. A common tag is **duì ba?** 对吧 meaning "right?"

Question	YES answer	NO answer
Nǐ de yé ye nǎi nai zài Melbourne zhù, <u>duì ba</u> ? 你的爷爷奶奶在墨尔本住, 对吧? <i>Your grandparents live in Melbourne, right?</i>	Duì. 对。 <i>That's right.</i>	Bú duì. 不对。 <i>No. (not right)</i>
Tā yǒu yí gè jiě jie, <u>duì ba</u> ? 他有一个姐姐, 对吧? <i>He has a sister, right?</i>		

3. By providing answer choices in the actual question. You include both the positive and the negative forms in the question:

Question	YES answer	NO answer
Nǐ <u>shì bù shì</u> lǎo dà? 你是不是老大? <i>Are you the eldest or not?</i> <i>(Are you or aren't you the eldest?)</i>	Shì de. 是的。 <i>I am.</i>	Bú shì. 不是。 <i>I'm not.</i>
Tā <u>yǒu méi yǒu</u> yí gè gē ge? 他有没有一个哥哥? <i>Does he have a brother or not?</i> <i>(Does he or doesn't he have?)</i>	Yǒu. 有。 <i>He has.</i>	Méi yǒu. 没有。 <i>No, he hasn't.</i>
Nǐ <u>xǐ huān bù xǐ huān</u> hē chá? 你喜欢不喜欢喝茶? <i>Do you like drinking tea or not?</i>	Xǐ huān. 喜欢。 <i>Yes, I do.</i>	Bú xǐ huān. 不喜欢。 <i>No, I don't.</i>
Nǐ <u>yào bu yào</u> qù Běi jīng? 你要不要去北京? <i>Do you want to go to Beijing or not?</i>	Yào. 要。 <i>Yes, I do.</i>	Bú yào. 不要。 <i>No, I don't.</i>

This way of asking can sound blunt in English, but is very acceptable in Chinese.