Formal and Informal – contractions and question tags

Usually, we are required to write in a formal way, choosing our language carefully to suit the tone of the writing and speak appropriately to the reader. There are occasions, however, when we want to make our writing more informal – in a character's speech, for example, in an advert, a children's information leaflet or a diary entry, to name a few.

Two ways in which we can achieve informality are **contractions** and **question tags.**

Activity 1. If you haven't already, revise and practise **contractions** in this quick quiz.

So, as you know, contractions are just pairs of words that are squashed together when we speak, with the loss of the sounds that we're too lazy to say; any missing letters are replaced with an apostrophe.

Activity 2. Now try these contractions in your exercise book (they are all based on Thursday's activity) – rewrite the sentences, changing the underlined more formal form to the informal contracted one;

1. It was so quiet, you <u>could have</u> heard a pin drop.

2. I <u>did not</u> really believe my wish would come true.

3. It was late, and there <u>were not</u> any people left.

4. <u>I had</u> got off the bus and was heading to the market place; I <u>could not</u> bear to go back to my empty flat yet.

5. <u>It is</u> always the same with him – he <u>can not</u> help himself, but wish for money.

Activity 3. Rewrite these informal sentences to show the **expanded** forms of the underlined contractions (again, you might be able to use some of these on Thursday).

6. It <u>should've</u> been simple, but <u>they'd</u> thrown the coins at the same time.

7. There was only one thing left for it – <u>I'd</u> have to use the emergency box of wishes.

8. I <u>don't</u> know why I bothered going to the fountain, as <u>I'd</u> never had any luck before.

9. I <u>wasn't</u> really paying attention, but I <u>couldn't</u> work out how on Earth <u>I'd</u> got back to the market square.

10. <u>It'd</u> been a close shave, but <u>they'd</u> managed to get together, and with any luck, <u>they'll</u> be happy.

Question tags are another way to show informality in our writing. In their simplest form, they are added to a statement to turn it into a question.

For example, It has been the longest ten weeks, hasn't it? Here, the question tag is created by an 'auxiliary' verb (supporting verb), which is just the verb from the main clause, turned into the negative form, with the pronoun 'it' on the end. Can you think of a couple more?

A question tag can also be positive, added to a negative statement.

e.g. You really don't want to do the washing up, do you? Again, the auxiliary verb is borrowed from the main clause and is followed by the same pronoun. Can you think of two others?

Activity 4: Watch this cheesy video carefully. Cheesy it may be, but it has a lot of information in it, so you might want to pause it on the orange and yellow summary screens when they appear.

Activity 5: Add question tags to the following statements; don't forget the question marks! Re-read your answers, to see if they make sense. The first three have the main verb underlined – this is what the auxiliary verb should be based on.

11. Of course, he _would_ want money.

12. Normally, I <u>don't</u> have any luck.

13. So many people come to the café and <u>don't</u> leave a tip.

14. I can dream.

15. I was bored of the same old thing.

Activity 6: Think of your own statements that could fit in front of the following question tags:

16. _____, should I?

17. _____, have you?

18. _____, won't you?

19. _____, aren't they?

20. _____, did he?