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Grammar: Alternative Question

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Definition & Function of Alternative Question

Definition:

An alternative question is a question that presents two or more possible answers and presupposes that only one is true.

Example:

Would you like chocolate, vanilla, or strawberry ice cream?

Function

An alternative question gives a choice of two or more answers in the question and includes *or*.

Example:

Would you like [choice 1] or [choice 2]

Source:

[Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik 1985](#) 823–824

Forming alternative questions

Forming alternative questions with an auxiliary verb

We usually form alternative questions with

- **an auxiliary verb (*be, do* or *have*) + subject + main verb or with a modal verb + subject + main verb**

Examples:

- ***Are we eating*** *in or out this evening?* (answer: *We're eating in.* or *We're eating out.*)
- Does she *works* *in the city or in the suburbs?* (answer: *She works in the city.* or *She works in the suburbs.*)
- Will they *buy* *a house or rent somewhere?* (answer: *They'll buy a house.* or *They'll rent somewhere.*)

Alternative question

Вспомогательный
(модальный)
глагол

подлежащее

сказуемое

...

or

...

?

To be	<p>Am <u>I</u> at work or at home? Is <u>she</u> a nurse or a driver? Are <u>you</u> at home or at school?</p>
Present Simple	<p>Do <u>you</u> <u>discuss</u> difficult or easy grammar rules at school? Does <u>Mary</u> or <u>Dina</u> <u>take care</u> of the little kitten?</p>
Past Simple	<p>Did <u>you</u> <u>take</u> a picture of a lizard in the zoo or in the country last week?</p>
Future Simple	<p>Will <u>Mary</u> <u>arrange</u> a picnic for her friends tomorrow or next Saturday?</p>
Can May Must	<p>Can <u>you</u> <u>drive</u> a car or a motor bike? May <u>I</u> <u>close</u> the window or the door? Must <u>I</u> <u>read</u> or <u>learn</u> the poem?</p>

Reduced alternative questions

Reduced alternative questions (*tea or coffee?*)

Sometimes in informal speaking, we make alternative questions shorter by just saying the alternatives:

A:

Would you like a coffee?

B:

That'd be great.

A:

Black or white?

B:

Black, please.

A:

Are you renting an apartment in London?

B:

Yeah, very near Paddington Station.

A:

Sharing or on your own?

B:

I'm sharing with some old friends.

References

- Business English <https://www.ego4u.com/en/business-english/grammar>
- [www.perfect-english](http://www.perfect-english.com)
- Chabner D.E. The Language of Medicine. St. Lois, Saunders Elsevier, 2007.