

# 39 Who, what or which?

## 1 What or which?

We can use **what** or **which** before a noun.

### WHAT

**What sport** do you play?

**What books** do you read?

We use **what** when there is a wide choice of possible answers. We ask *What sport?* because there are lots of different sports.



*What sport?*  
(Tennis or golf or football or hockey or ... ?)

### WHICH

**Which way** do we go here?

**Which finger** did you break?

We use **which** when there is a limited number of possible answers. We ask *Which way?* because there are only two or three ways to go.



*Which way?*  
(Right or left?)

After **which** we sometimes say the possible answers.

**Which** café did you go to, *Snoopy's, the Coffee Pot or the Tea Gardens?*

**Which** phone shall I use, *this one or the one in the office?*

Sometimes **what** and **which** are both possible.

**What day/Which** day is your evening class? **What train/Which** train will you catch?

**What platform/Which** platform does the train go from? **What part/Which** part of Italy are you from?

## 2 Patterns with who, what and which

We can use **who**, **what** and **which** without a noun.

**Who** sent the fax? **What** do you think of our plan? **Which** is quicker, the bus or the train?

We can use **what** and **which** before a noun, but not **who**.

**Which** secretary sent the fax? NOT ~~Who secretary sent the fax?~~

We can use **which** with **one** or **ones**, or with **of**.

You can have a photo. **Which one** would you like?

You can have some of the photos. **Which ones** would you like?

**Which of** these photos would you like?

But we cannot use **who** or **what** before **of**.

**Which of** the secretaries? but NOT ~~Who of the secretaries?~~

**Who** always means a person.

**Who** did you see? (a person)

**What** usually means a thing. It can mean a person only when it comes before a noun.

**What** did you see? (a thing) **What doctor/What film** did you see? (a person or a thing)

**Which** can mean a person or a thing.

**Which doctor/film** did you see? (a person or a thing)

▷ 102 One and ones

# Practice

## A What or which? (1)

The questions you are asking have a number of possible answers.

If the list of answers is incomplete, ask a question with *what*. If the list is complete, use *which*.

- ▶ (Do you play the piano, or the violin, or the guitar, or ...?)  
*What musical instrument do you play?*.....
- ▶ (Did you go to the Little Theatre or the Theatre Royal?)  
*Which theatre did you go to?*.....
- 1 (Did you take the morning flight or the afternoon flight?)  
.....
- 2 (Did you stay at the Grand Hotel or the Bristol?)  
.....
- 3 (Do you like classical music, or jazz, or rock music, or ...?)  
.....
- 4 (Did you buy 'Time' magazine, or 'Newsweek', or a computer magazine, or ...?)  
.....
- 5 (Do you work for EuroChemicals, or ICM, or SenCo, or ...?)  
.....
- 6 (Are you learning English, or Spanish, or Arabic, or Japanese, or ...?)  
.....

## B What or which? (1)

Rita is moving into a new flat. Trevor has come to see the flat and help her move in.

Complete his questions. Put in *what* or *which*.

- ▶ Trevor: *What*..... number is this building?  
Rita: Forty-two.
- 1 Trevor: I didn't realize there were only three floors. .... floor is your flat on?  
Rita: The first floor.
- 2 Trevor: It's a very nice flat. .... room will be your living-room?  
Rita: This one here, I thought.
- 3 Trevor: .... colour are you going to paint it?  
Rita: Oh, I don't know yet.
- 4 Trevor: .... time is your furniture arriving?  
Rita: Three o'clock, they said.
- 5 Trevor: I'll need some petrol. .... way is the nearest petrol station?  
Rita: Turn left at the end of the street.

## C Who, what or which? (2)

Detectives Wilson and Taylor are looking into the murder of Lord Weybridge at his country house.

Put in *who*, *what* or *which*.

- Wilson: ▶ *Which*..... of the guests in this house is the murderer, do you think, Taylor?
- Taylor: I don't know yet. (1)..... had the opportunity? (2)..... of the guests had the chance to do it?
- Wilson: (3)..... happened after dinner last night? That's what we have to find out.
- Taylor: There must be a motive for the murder. (4)..... motive could the murderer have?
- Wilson: Love or money – they're the usual motives. (5)..... of them is it, I wonder?
- Taylor: (6)..... did Lord Weybridge leave his money to? That's the question, Wilson.