

Asking for information

What/Where/Who/When/Which...?

- **What time is it?**
- **Where's that new report?**

This is the simplest type of question. It is used in informal conversations with colleagues whom you work with regularly. In other situations, this type of question may be considered impolite.

Could/Can you tell me...?

- **Could you tell me where the toilet (US: restroom) is?**

This type of the question can be used when asking for general information in public places. For example, you might say to an airport employee, "Excuse me – can you tell me...?"

I was wondering...

- **I was wondering if you could tell me where the meeting is taking place.**

This type is a standard opening at the start of relatively impersonal encounters. It often comes in response to "May I help you?". In that situation, one would say, "Yes – I was wondering..."

Do you know...?

- **Do you know (by any chance) when the meeting is expected to end?**

This type of question is often used when you have been talking about the subject of your question (here, the meeting) already. If you add "by any chance", you are showing that you do not necessarily expect your colleague to know the answer.

Any idea...?

- **Any idea where Kyle is?**

This informal question (short for "Have you got any idea...") is used in the same way as "Do you know..." and is reserved for colleagues and friends.

Do you happen to know...?

- **Do you happen to know where Mr. Lewis is?**

This is a variation on "Do you know...?". Most often, it is used when asking something that has nothing to do with what was said before. You might introduce the question by saying, "By the way..."

You wouldn't happen to know...?

- **You wouldn't happen to know where my stapler went, would you?**

This variation on "Do you happen to know" implies that you don't really expect the person to be able to provide the information. (This is also a good opening if you are looking for something but don't want to ask directly if your colleague moved it.)

CAREFUL!

Some phrases are best avoided in this context:

- **Would you mind telling me where you've been?**

"Would you mind" is neutral in "Would you mind shutting the door?". But used with the verbs "tell" and "say", the phrase is sarcastic. The sentence above would be typical of a parent speaking to a naughty child.

- **Would you be so kind as to tell me where he is?**

"Would you be so kind..." is a very formal and old-fashioned beginning. In most contexts today, it signals sarcasm. The sentence above might be used to signal that the question is being asked for the second time.