

If vs whether

CEFR B1 • 20 questions • A4 / US Letter

Both words introduce reported yes or no questions, but whether is required after prepositions and before to-infinitives.

The rule

Both words report a yes or no question

- "I asked if the shop was open" and "I asked whether the shop was open" are both correct.
- The choice is between yes and no, so no question mark is needed in the reported form.
- After ask, know, wonder, remember and see, both words are common.
- If is more casual; whether sounds slightly more formal.

Whether after a preposition

- After a preposition, only whether is possible: "It depends on whether she agrees."
- "It depends on if she agrees" is not standard English.
- The same rule applies to about, of and in: "We talked about whether to move house."
- The pattern appears a lot in questions of choice: "There is no question of whether he can do it."

Whether before a to-infinitive

- Whether + to-infinitive expresses a choice about an action: "I cannot decide whether to take the job."
- If cannot be followed by to: "if to take the job" is wrong.
- The pattern works with know, wonder, decide and ask: "She wondered whether to call him."
- A full clause after whether works the same way: "whether she should call him".

Whether or not and if or not

- "Whether or not it rains, we will go" is the standard pattern at the start of a sentence.
- In the middle of a sentence, both work: "I will go whether or not it rains" and "I will go if it rains or not".
- If takes or not at the end of its clause, not directly after if: "if it rains or not", never "if or not it rains".
- After whether, or not can come straight away or at the end.

If means condition too

- If has a second job: it introduces conditions, and whether cannot do that job.
- "If you are late, we will start without you" is a condition, not a choice.
- In reported questions, if keeps the meaning of a yes or no question.
- When in doubt in a reported question, whether is always safe; in a condition, only if works.

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. I do not know ___ she will come to the party.

2. It depends on ___ the shop is open.

3. I cannot decide ___ to take the job.

4. We talked about ___ the plan would work.

5. ___ or not it rains, the match will start.

6. She asked ___ I wanted tea or coffee.

7. I wonder ___ he is at home.

8. ___ you are late, we will start without you.

9. There is some doubt about ___ he can finish on time.

10. She wondered ___ to call him or wait.

11. Please tell me ___ the parcel has arrived or not.

12. I asked him ___ he was feeling well.

13. The decision depends on ___ everyone agrees.

14. He could not remember ___ he had locked the door.

15. I do not care ___ you are rich or poor.

16. ___ she calls, tell her I am out.

17. We are not sure ___ to go by train.

18. It is not clear ___ the museum is open today.

19. Think about ___ you really need the car.

20. I will bring an umbrella ___ it rains.

Answer key

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1. **if** — Both if and whether fit a reported yes or no question; if is the casual choice.
2. **whether** — After the preposition on, only whether is standard.
3. **whether** — Whether takes a to-infinitive, and if cannot be followed by to.
4. **whether** — After the preposition about, whether is required.
5. **Whether** — At the start of a sentence, whether or not is the standard pattern.
6. **if** — If introduces the reported question about a yes or no choice; whether would also fit.
7. **whether** — Whether introduces the reported question; if would also be correct.
8. **If** — This is a condition, and only if marks a condition.
9. **whether** — After the preposition about, whether is the correct choice.
10. **whether** — Whether + to-infinitive expresses the choice; if cannot take to.
11. **whether** — Whether pairs naturally with or not in this reported question; if is not among the options.
12. **if** — If introduces the reported yes or no question; whether also fits.
13. **whether** — On is a preposition, so the clause needs whether.
14. **whether** — Whether reports the doubt about a yes or no action; if also fits here.
15. **whether** — Whether pairs with the two options rich or poor.
16. **If** — This is a condition, so if is the correct word.
17. **whether** — The to-infinitive after the gap requires whether.
18. **whether** — Whether introduces the uncertain yes or no fact; if would also fit.
19. **whether** — Think about needs the preposition about, so whether follows.
20. **if** — The umbrella depends on the rain, so this is a condition with if.