

LESSON NOTES

Learn Cantonese in Three Minutes #21 Asking "What" in Cantonese

CONTENTS

2 Grammar

21

GRAMMAR

The focus of this lesson is Asking "What" in Cantonese

Topic 1: How to use "what"

Sentence from the lesson:

佢做乜呀？

keoi5 zou6 mat1 aa6 ?

"What is he doing?"

1. So imagine you want to ask your friend "What is he doing?" How would you do it?
You will ask: *keoi5 zou6 mat1 aa6 ?*
2. So let's break down this answer: *keoi5* can refer to "he," "she," or "it" *zou6mat1*, which is "what." Finally, the *aa6* is a question particle. This phrase, *keoi5 zou6 mat1 aa6 ?*, literally "he do what?" can also mean "What's wrong with him?"
3. Let's look at another example. This phrase is very common in restaurants: *nei5 sik6 mat1 aa6 ?* "What are you eating?"
4. The rule is simple: every time you want to ask a "What" question with a verb, remember to put the verb IN FRONT OF *mat1*. And if there is a noun in the question, place it AFTER *mat1*.

For example:

mat1 ngaan4 sik1 → "what color"

mat1 lam1 baa2 → "what number"

Let's see some sample sentences:

nei5 zung1 ji3 mat1 ngaan4 sik1 ? → literally "you like what color?"

nei5 soeng5 maai5 mat1 lam1 baa2 ? → literally "you want to buy what number?"

Language Tip

Sometimes you might hear *me1* instead of *mat1* when people are asking "What" questions. These two words are interchangeable.

keoi5 zou6 mat1 aa6 ? keoi5 zou6 me1 aa6 ? "What is he doing?"

nei5 sik6 mat1 aa6 ? nei5 sik6 me1 aa6 ? "What are you eating?"