

LESSON NOTES

Learn Cantonese in Three Minutes #25 Asking "Why" in Cantonese

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GRAMMAR

The focus of this lesson is asking "Why" in Cantonese

Topic 1: How to use "why"

Sentence from the lesson:

點解你唔返工？

dim2 gaai2 nei5 m4 faan1 gung1?

"Why didn't you come to work today?"

1. Imagine your boss is giving you a call because you are not at work today. He will certainly ask you *dim2 gaai2 nei5 m4 faan1 gung1?* "Why didn't you come to work today?"
2. So let's break down this question:
點解 *dim2 gaai2*, which is the basic translation of "Why" in Cantonese.
你 *nei5* is "you"
唔 *m4*, which is "no," or "not"
And finally 返工 *faan1 gung1* which is "to go to work"
3. In Cantonese, *dim2 gaai2* is the exact translation of "Why," used to ask the reason for something.
For example:
點解遲到 *dim2 gaai2 ci4 dou3?*
"Why are you late?"
4. Note that 點解 *dim2 gaai2* can be placed either before or after the subject, or in some cases, the subject is even omitted when you're talking to the person directly.
For example:
你點解辭職？ *nei5 dim2 gaai2 ci4 zik1?*
點解你辭職？ *dim2 gaai2 nei5 ci4 zik1?*
點解辭職？ *dim2 gaai2 ci4 zik1?*
"Why did you resign?"

Language Tip!

Another common usage of *dim2 gai2* is to ask the definition of something. So, in this case, 點解 *dim2 gai2* is closer to the meaning of "What does it mean?"

For example:

依個字點解? *ji1 go3 zi6 dim2 gai2?*

"What does this word mean?"

The person asking this question is looking for the definition, not the reason.