Interrogative clauses

Interrogative clauses can be of two distinct types: yes/no questions and wh-questions (wh=interrogative element).
Both types can be main or embedded clauses.

In interrogative clauses we have obligatory subject inversion when
a) the interrogative clause is a main clause
b) the wh item is NOT the subject itself

Interrogative inversion has the following properties
a) it requires an auxiliary of a modal verb
   (1) When are you leaving?
   (2) What has John done?
   (3) What will I do?
   (4) What can he do?
   If there is none, the “dummy” auxiliary do is inserted
   (5) Where did you go?
   (6) What does John do?

In Italian this order is not possible: the subject is either at the very beginning or at the end of the whole clause.
   (7) Gianni, cosa ha fatto?
   (8) Cosa ha fatto Gianni?
   (9) *Cosa ha Gianni fatto?

In Italian the order in (8) is possible in embedded clauses as well, in English it is NOT
   (10) *I wonder what has John done
   (11) *I wonder what has done John
   (12) *I wonder what did John
   (13) Mi chiedo cosa ha fatto Gianni

The same is true in yes/no questions

Wh items

Interrogative pronouns, phrases and adverbs are known as wh-items because the all begin with wh-. They cannot be inflected, the only element that changes is who \( \rightarrow \) whom when it is the object of he verb or of a preposition. Nevertheless, this is only high style, in the spoken language who is used instead of whom and the preposition is left in the position where the non wh-item usually appears:

   (14) To whom did you talk?
   (15) Who did you talk to?

Expressions with what:
   a) What is it like?
   b) What does it look like?
   c) What are you? Che lavoro fai?
   d) What +adjective is used in measure expression:
There is a distinction between *who/what* and *which*: which is used when the choice is restricted, the difference between *what* and *which* is similar to the one between *che* and *quale* in Italian.

A number of expressions can be added to the wh-item to express either surprise or disapproval. They are: ever, the hell, on earth, in the world

(16) Where ever/the hell/on earth have you been? These cases are different from wh*ever* written as a single word, which corresponds to Italian – unque.