Why and Why not

We use **why** is short replies to affirmative statements. We use **why not** in replies to negative statements.

Compare:

‘He **has decided** to quit his job.’ ‘**Why?**’ (NOT Why not?)
‘I can’t do this.’ ‘**Why not?**’ (More natural than ‘Why?’)

**Why not** can also be used to agree to a suggestion.

‘Let’s go for a walk.’ ‘Yes, **why not?**’

**Why not + infinitive**

**Why** can be followed by an infinitive without to. This structure is used to suggest that an action is unnecessary.

**Why argue** with him? He will never change his mind. (NOT Why arguing with him?) (NOT why to argue with him?)

**Why not + infinitive** is used to suggest something for other people’s consideration and acceptance.

**Why not dismiss** him from service?

The above sentence means ‘Why should we not dismiss him from service?’
This is a more pointed way of making a suggestion than ‘What about dismissing him from service?’

**Notes**
It is wrong to say ‘Why not we dismiss him from service?’. This is a common error which should be carefully avoided. No noun or pronoun should come after **why not**.

More examples are given below:

**Why not buy** and pay later?
**Why not try** it again?
**Why not arrange** a party in his honor?

‘**Why don’t**’ can be used in the same way. Note that it is followed by a noun / pronoun.

**Why don’t you try** it again? (NOT Why don’t try it again?)
**Why don’t we go** and see him?
Why should

The structure ‘why should...?’ suggests surprise. In American English, ‘Why would...?’ is used.

I wonder why she should get angry with me.

This structure can also suggest refusal to do something.

I don’t understand why we should have to pay for your mistakes.