

The basic word order in English is subject-verb-object.

Ex. Myrna (S) makes (V) the best cucumber salad (O).

However, a speaker who wants to emphasize that Myrna, not someone else, makes the best cucumber salad might say: It's Myrna who makes the best cucumber salad. This type of construction is called **clefting**.

There's another construction called **passive**: The best cucumber salad is made by Myrna.

There are six grammatical devices to manipulate word order in clauses: fronting, inversion of subjects and verbs, existential *there* clauses, dislocation, clefting, and variations in the ordering of subjects.

Four major discourse factors are important in understanding the grammatical choices that influence word order:

- 1) information flow
- 2) focus and emphasis, including end-focus and double focus
- 3) contrast
- 4) weight, including end-weight and balance of weight.

INFORMATION FLOW

If we look at a clause in its discourse context, some elements refer back to information that's familiar due to the preceding discourse and other elements present new information. The typical word order in English is to start with given information and move to new.

ex. Inside the house Mr Summers found a family of cats shut in the bathroom

We know that the **house** and **Mr Summers** had already been mentioned, then the communication advances with the information about what Mr Summers found. This typical ordering of information -from given to new- is the information-flow principle. This contributes to the cohesion of a text.

FOCUS AND EMPHASIS

In any sentence there is usually at least one point of focus. This point receives some prominence in the clause; it is apparent in speech because the strongest stress or intonation peak will occur at this point. Typically, the focus occurs naturally on the last lexical item in the clause (ex. the bathroom, from previous example). The general principle governing focus is therefore known as the principle of **end-focus**.

However, there is another potential point of focus in a clause: the beginning.

The focus is increased by starting the sentence with an element other than the subject: the result is clause with double focus.

When an initial element is the point of focus, it gains prominence. A complement of the verb in initial position is intensified: 'Brilliant that was!' has the same meaning of 'That was absolutely brilliant!'.

CONTRAST

Contrast occurs when the focused part is highlighted to show its difference from another element: It's not the **bikers** - it's the **other vehicle** that's on the road.

Here the other vehicle is focused and contrasted with the bikers in the preceding clause in a parallel structure.

The manipulation of a sentence structure shows contrast just as the coordinator *but* and linking adverb *however* do.

WEIGHT

Elements in a clause are frequently of different size and complexity relating to their weight. For

instance, a noun phrase consisting of a head noun with long premodifiers and past modifiers is much heavier than a noun phrase consisting of a single pronoun.

The preferred distribution of elements in the clause are called the principle of **end-weight**: long and complex elements are placed towards the end of the clause.

Word order

The term 'word order' is used to refer to the order of elements in a clause: subject, verb, object, predicative, and adverbial.

The **unmarked** word order in English (i.e. clauses that contain the normal word order) has the following characteristics:

- The subject normally precedes the verb, and the verb normally precedes its complements: S + V, S + V + A, S + V + SP, S + V + DO, S + V + Prep + PO, etc.
- Independent interrogative clauses normally have subject-operator inversion (e.g. *Are you sure?*).
- All clause elements realized by *wh*-words are regularly placed in initial position. For example: *I don't know [what you want].* (CONV). (Even though *what* is the object in the dependent clause (*you want what*), it is placed before the subject *you*.)
- Phrases are normally continuous. This means that a phrase is not usually broken up by another element.

FRONTING

Fronting means placing an initial position a clause element which is normally found after the verb. Fronting is relatively rare in English and it is almost always in the clarity of the main clauses (except for the fronting of *wh*-words)

- fronted object: the object of the clause is in initial opposition. Many different structures occur as fronted objects such as nouns, pronouns and complement clauses. (ex. **This** I do not understand).

- fronted nominals other than objects: a nominal structure is in a neutral position such as the compliment to the objective *certain* in the example here (ex. **Whether Nancy was there or not**, she could not be certain).

-fronted predicatives: a subject predicative is an initial position. Special cases include the **proportion** clauses with *the* and degree clauses with *so.. that*. (ex. **Far more serious** were the severe head injuries)

- fronted non-finite constructions: an infinitive, ing-participle, or ed-participle is in initial position. Its complements are fronted with it. (ex. I have said he would come down and **come down** he did.)

-fronting in dependent clauses that use *as* or *though*: dependent clauses that use the subordinator *as* or *though* sometimes have an element placed before the subordinator. (ex. **Try** as she might to make it otherwise.)

-fronting in exclamations: exclamative clauses with *wh*-element have obligatory fronting, since the *wh*-element has to occur in pre-subject position. (ex. **Charming** you are!). It is often used with irony and sarcasm.

INVERSION

In **inversion** the verb phrase or the operator comes before the subject (underlined in the examples) There are two main types of inversion:

- subject-verb inversion/full inversion: the subject is preceded by the entire verb phrase: ex. Best of all **would be to get a job in Wellington**.

This inversion is most often found with an initial adverbial which has a cohesive function

like *here* and *there*. Ex. **Here** comes the first question.

But also in short intransitive/copular verb phrases and long subjects. Ex. Among the sports **will be** athletics, badminton, basketball...

- Subject-operator inversion: the subject is preceded only by the operator rather than by the main verb:

Ex. Not before in our history **have** so many strong influences **united** to produce so large a disaster.

This inversion is found after initial negative expressions such as: *neither, normal, never, nowhere, on no condition, not only, hardly, no sooner, rarely, scarcely, seldom, little, less, only*. Ex. I haven't got a copy of club rules. **Nor have** I.

It also occurs in clauses that begin with the degree adverb *so* followed by an adjective or adverb and similar with *such...that*. Ex. **So badly was** he affected that he had to be taught to speak again; **Such is** the gravity of the situation **that** it has already sparked an international incident.

Special types of inversion in dependent clauses

clause	examples	description
comparative clauses with <i>as</i> and <i>than</i>	<i>Independent agencies are in a better position to offer personal service than are those tied to big chains.</i> (NEWS)	The operator follows the subordinator <i>as</i> or <i>than</i> . Usually in formal writing.
some clauses of manner	<i>Charlotte was fascinated, as were the other guests.</i> (FICT)	The operator follows the subordinator <i>as</i> .
conditional clauses that are hypothetical or tentative and use <i>had, should, or were</i>	1 <i>Should either of these situations occur, wrong control actions may be taken.</i> (ACAD) 2 <i>Were it running more slowly, all geologic activity would have proceeded at a slower pace.</i> (ACAD)	The verbs <i>had, should, or were</i> come before the subject. The alternative form is to use the subordinator <i>if</i> (1 <i>If either of these situations occur ...</i>).
conditional clauses that present alternatives or universals	1 <i>When the going gets tough, it's these people who react best – be it a natural disaster, accident or sudden emergency.</i> (NEWS) 2 <i><...> [He] has somewhat desperately tried to make up his mind to utter his whole self, come what may.</i> (ACAD)	Alternative clauses can be paraphrased with <i>whether it/he/she/they is/are</i> . The subjective <i>be</i> is used. For (1) compare: <i>whether it is a natural disaster</i> . Universal clauses express a condition that is universally true. They can be paraphrased with <i>whatever</i> . For (2) compare: <i>whatever may come</i> .
interrogative clauses	<i>And she said would we like these shirts.</i> (CONV)	The inversion gives the sentence characteristics of both direct and indirect speech.
reporting clauses	<i>'That's the whole trouble,' said Gwen, laughing slightly.</i> (FICT)	The reporting clause may have subject-verb inversion. Inversion is not usual, however, when the clause subject is a pronoun (<i>said she</i>).

EXISTENTIAL THERE

Existential there is a device used to state the existence or occurrence of something.

It is used with and intransitive or copular verb. Most typically it has this structure:

there + be + indefinite noun phrase (+ place or time position adverbial)

ex. There's a bear sitting in the corner.

The noun phrase following *be* is called the **notional subject**. A *bear* is notional subject.

Existential *there* is a function word. It developed from the place adverb *there*, but it no longer has a meaning of place. Existential *there* differs from the place adverb *there* in the following ways:

- phonologically
- the original place meaning is lost
- syntactically, it functions as a subject rather than an adverbial.

Great majority of existential their closest contain a form of the verb *be*. It may be preceded by auxiliaries or semi-modals: *has been, will be, is to be, is supposed to be, used to be...*

Be may occur in a to-infinitive complement, where the controlling lexical verb expressed a kind of stance: *happen to be, tend to be, appear to be, is said to be...*

ex. There **used to be** a house on the end of ...

There **is supposed to be** a plot between you and me to...

The notional subject is the noun phrase that functions logically as the subject of the clause. Since *there* has no content, the notional subject is what the clause is mainly about. Usually, it's an indefinite noun phrase.

ex. There won't be **a mass**.

There was **nobody** here yesterday.

There is **something extra and a little heroic about him**.

Often the important information of an existential clause is not simply that something exists, but when or where it exists. So, existential clauses often contain a time or place adverbial.

ex. I said, well, there's a wheelbarrow **down there**.

DISLOCATION

Dislocation has to do with how information is distributed in spoken language.

It is not a simple word order option, but involves breaking up a clause-like a structure into two separate chunks. Ex. **This little shop** | it's lovely.

Prefaces can precede both declarative and interrogative clauses.

ex. **That picture of a frog**, where is it?

Noun phrase tags may follow both declarative and interrogative clauses. The tag normally refers back to the subject of the preceding clause.

ex. Has it got double doors, **that shop**?

It was a good book **this**.

CLEFTING

It is similar to dislocation because information that could be given in a single simple clause is broken up.

•**it-clefts**: It's a man I want.

They consist of the pronoun *it*, a form of the verb *be* accompanied by not or an adverb such as *only*, the focused element (noun phrase, prepositional phrase, adverb phrase, adverbial clause), relative-like dependent clause introduced by *that, who/which*, or *zero*.

ex. It is **here**; It was **because they were frightened**; It was **his voice**..

•**wh-clefts**: What I want is something to eat, now!

They consist of a clause introduced by a *wh-word* (*what*), a form of the verb *be*, the specially focused nominal element (noun phrase or complement clause).

ex. [What I really need] is **another credit card**; [What you should do] is **tag them when they come in**.

WORD ORDER CHOICES AFTER THE VERB

1) **placement of direct objects (d.o) and indirect objects (i.o).**

Ditransitive verbs often allow two options that are equivalent in meaning.

- indirect object + direct object: I'll fix [you (i.o)] [some tea (d.o)]
- direct object + preposition *to* or *for* + prepositional object (p.o) : I'll fix [it (d.o)] [for [you (p.o)]]

2) pronoun sequences as direct and indirect objects.

Where both the direct and then direct objects of personal pronouns there are three major patterns:

- direct object + *to*-phrase: Give **it to me**, Pauli!
- indirect object + direct object: Give **me it**, you little cow!
- direct object + indirect object: 'Do let me give **it him**' she said.

3) clauses with direct object and object predictive.

Direct object usually proceeds an object predictive, however the object may be postponed to the end position under particular circumstances. The objective predicative is underlined, the postponed direct object is in bold:

ex. Each region has a responsibility to create and make available **a collection of contemporary work**.

Object predicative is light in such cases in comparison with the direct object, which is long and complex. Where the direct object is a pronoun or a short noun and headed phrase, it must precede the object predicative. Ex. I can make **you** available to people, yeah?

4) placement of objects of phrasal verbs.

For transitive phrasal verbs direct objects can be placed before or after the adverbial particle.

In the following examples, the adverbial particle is underlined, the direct object is marked in bold.

Ex. Why do you like picking up **the telephone** so much?

Where the object is a pronoun, it is usually placed between the verb and the particle.

ex. How fast can you pick **it** up?

When the direct object is an indefinite pronoun, it is often placed after the adverbial particle.

ex. He sent out **someone** to capture the bounty hunter.