

Word Order
in
English Sentences
Phil Williams

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Word Order in English Sentences

2nd Edition

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PREFACE

This guide is for English learners of all levels who want a full introduction to word order and sentence structure in English. Starting at a basic level, it gradually introduces more complex sentence structures and components, and provides plenty of practice through rearranging words to make sentences. An understanding of English may be necessary before beginning.

The basic rules presented here are important as a basis for more complex grammar later. A strong and flexible use of English is made possible through a solid understanding of the more simple initial rules; in English the rules are often bent and broken, but to do this effectively you must first know the rules.

You can use this book by reading through different sentence structure and word order rules one at a time, in sequential order, or by using the contents as a reference to find information on specific items.

This grammar book is written in English. Translations will be available in the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phil Williams is an English teacher and writer based in Brighton, UK. He has taught in schools and privately, in the UK, the United Arab Emirates, Russia and the Czech Republic, and is qualified with a Trinity Certificate in TESOL, and a Trinity IBET for Business English. He has written for businesses, entertainment, and websites – and writes and manages the regularly updated ESL website [English Lessons Brighton](http://EnglishLessonsBrighton.com).

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SAMPLE

INTRODUCTION

In the English language, word order and sentence structure are important. Changing the order of words, or the structure of a sentence, can affect meaning. However, the English language is also flexible, and in many cases the order can be changed.

This guide is designed to introduce the basics of word order and sentence structure, and to provide general points on how word order and sentence structure can change. It does this by first introducing simplified components of English sentences, such as Subject-Verb-Object rules, and develops these ideas with more detailed analysis of the components, considering nouns, verb phrases, questions, prepositional phrases, adjectives, adverbs and more.

After covering these general rules, consideration is given to more advanced use of English, including rewriting English sentences with different structures, analysing the effects that this can cause. As such, the guide starts simply, and has simple exercises, and builds to more specific and challenging points.

This guide is designed as an introduction, so is not a comprehensive analysis of word order and sentence structure. It should be noted that there are countless examples of unique word order patterns in English. The guide also only provides a simple introduction to verb structures, which are very varied in practice.

How to use this book

This guide offers explanations of form, examples of form and explanations of flexible rules. Many sections are followed by jumbled sentence exercises with answers. You can read the sections individually to learn about different structures of English, or you can read the book in order, to get an overall understanding of word order and sentence structure.

There are regular examples to aid understanding. The examples used are deliberately varied and often unconventional, so carefully comparing the examples may help test your understanding of the information offered here.

Please note that this guide is written in British English. Although some consideration has been given to the differences between British and American English, it may still contain regionally specific language.

Colour coding

This guide is colour-coded to highlight important grammar points, structure and examples.

- ↘ Listed examples are given with bullet points.
- ↘ *Italics* show examples within the main body of the text, or emphasis and additional information in listed examples.
- ↘ **Bold black** is used for structure and form, and emphasis in examples.
- ↘ **Orange** highlights grammar rules and words of importance.
- ↘ [Blue words](#) indicate related material in the guide or online.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

1.1 Introducing Sentence Structure

Sentences in English use a standard general order, that can be simply explained as:

(1) Subject (2) Verb (3) Object

These general groups of words can be a single word each, or entire phrases. This is especially true for the **object** part of the sentence structure, which can represent any **complement** to the verb and **additional information**.

Subject	Verb (s)	Object / Additional Information
I	like	cats.
The grey church	has been decorated	by a friendly group of builders.

- ↘ The **subject** is the **actor** of the verb.
- ↘ The **verb** is the **action, event** or **state**.
- ↘ The **object** is what the verb is done **to**.

For sentences with more information, the additional information can be divided into specific parts, including **indirect object**, **direct object**, **place/location** and **time**. These usually follow this order:

(1) Subject (2) Verb (3) Indirect Object (4) Direct Object (5) Prepositional Phrase (6) Time

Subject	Verb (s)	Indirect Object	Direct Object	Prepositional phrase	Time
I	will show	you	my answers	in the cafe	tomorrow.

- ↘ The **indirect object** is what is **affected** by the verb.
- ↘ **Prepositional phrases** or **places** are noun phrases usually started by a preposition. As well as location, they can show different indirect objects or tools used (with prepositions such as *with*, *for*, and *to*).
- ↘ The **time** is **when** the event happens.

Not all groups of words are necessary in all sentences. A basic sentence in English should at least have a subject and verb, though sometimes even a subject is not necessary (such as with instructions).

Table 3: Examples of Sentence Structure

Subject	Verb (s)	Indirect Object	Direct Object	Prepositional Phrase	Time
He	went			home.	
They	made		a mess	on the floor	this morning.
	Give	me	the pen		at once.
The bird	flew			past the tower	at noon.
I	had		dinner	with Jim.	

1.2 Adding Detail to Sentences

To add information to subjects and objects we can use **adjectives**. To add information to verbs, we use **adverbs**. These create groups of words that form **phrases**, many words referring to one idea (noun, verb, object, location, time, etc.).

- ↘ **The tired old man** swept the floor. (*The whole **noun phrase** forms the **subject**.*)
- ↘ They ate **too much chocolate cake**. (*The whole **noun phrase** forms the **object**.*)
- ↘ We **have been watching** films all day. (*The whole **verb form** forms the **verb**.*)

1.3 Exercise 1: Simple Sentence Structure

Put the scrambled sentences in the correct order.

✎ have eaten / I / too much cheese
I have eaten too much cheese.

1. house / we / moved

2. look / very tired / you

3. rats / rather small / are

4. talks / he / too much

5. she / to the park / went

6. have been reading / I / about pigs

7. all the jewels / the gang / has stolen

8. really wants / Peter / his best friend's car

9. from our bins / a lot of raccoons / have been stealing

10. aren't going to work / until they are paid more / the angry workmen

1.3a Answers to Exercise 1

Demonstrated in the simple structure table, the answers are:

	Subject	Verb	Object / Additional Information
1	We	moved	house.
2	You	look	very tired.
3	Rats	are	rather small.
4	He	talks	too much.
5	She	went	to the park.
6	I	have been reading	about pigs.
7	The gang	has stolen	all the jewels.
8	Peter	really wants	his best friend's car.
9	A lot of raccoons	have been stealing	from our bins.
10	The angry workmen	aren't going to work	until they are paid more.

1.4 Sentences with More Than One Clause

When sentences have more than one **clause**, a complete grammatical idea, each clause follows the same structure pattern.

The final sentence of [1.3 Exercise 1: Simple Sentence Structure](#) has a more complex verb structure. Its additional information (*until they are paid more*) is a **time clause**, a complete clause with a subject and verb, used to show a time. Although it is part of a larger sentence, and follows an adverb of time (*until*), the clause uses a standard **subject-verb-object** order.

Entire clauses can make up different components of a sentence in this way.

Additional clauses can be used to form compound and complex sentences, using independent clauses, dependent clauses and relative dependent clauses. These are connected with different types of conjunctions and relative pronouns. While this may sound complicated, each clause within the sentence will follow similar word order and sentence structure rules. The subject of multiple clauses is covered later in this book, after the fundamental rules of creating each clause (see [Chapter 9](#)).

1.5 Exercise 2: Further Sentence Structure

Put the scrambled sentences in the correct order.

✎ waited / he / by the lamp / for the bus

He waited for the bus by the lamp.

1. sang / about summer / we / songs

2. all evening / played / football / they

3. for hours / were dancing / we / to the music

4. never eat / after dark / sweets

5. me / too many people / have given / the wrong answers

6. with some cheese / the mice / I / fed

7. my ticket / gave / I / to the inspector

8. was phoning / she / her friends / all night / for fun

9. the dirty dishes / Winston / washed / with soap

10. the carton of milk / leave / by the sink / when you finish

1.5a Answers to Exercise 2

Demonstrated in the detailed sentence structure table, the answers are:

	Subject	Verb (s)	Indirect Object	Direct Object	Prepositional Phrase	Time
1	We	sang		songs	about summer.	
2	They	played		football		all evening
3	We	were dancing			to the music	for hours.
4		Never eat		sweets		after dark.
5	Too many people	have given	me	the wrong answers.		
6	I	fed	the mice		with some cheese.	
7	I	gave		my ticket	to the inspector.	
8	She	was phoning		her friends	for fun	all night.
9	Winston	washed		the dirty dishes	with soap.	
10		Leave		the carton of milk	by the sink	when you finish.

Note that **Sentence 4** starts with the word *Never*, not a subject or verb. Sometimes modifiers of a verb can begin a sentence, when there is no subject. This follows rules explained in the section on [Adverbs](#).

In **Sentence 7**, the prepositional phrase contains the indirect object (*the inspector*). When the indirect object and the verb are connected by a preposition such as *to*, *for* and *with*, the indirect object usually comes **after** the direct object, as an object of a prepositional phrase instead of an indirect object of the verb.

ENJOYED READING?

This sample represents about 15% of *Word Order in English Sentences*, formatted for PDF/print. It is also available optimised for eReaders. If you found it useful and would like to read on, get the full book directly from the ELB site [HERE](#).

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