

WORD ORDER

When you are establishing priorities in improving your English, it is probable that 'word order' is not high on the list. However, it's an important subject, and putting the words in the wrong order should be as embarrassing as making a grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation mistake.

Expressing a natural English word order is less difficult in writing, because you have time to think. When you are speaking, it's easy to fall into the trap of translating, that is, saying the words in exactly the same order as you would in your own language. The exercises below cover some basic points about word order. Sometimes they concern large parts of a sentence, and sometimes the position of individual words.

BASIC SENTENCE STRUCTURE

A simple rule is:

- do not separate the **verb** from the **direct object**

Right: I **eat an apple** every day.

Wrong: I eat every day an apple.

Right: The parliament **voted a law** last month.

Wrong: The parliament voted last month a law.

Exceptions to the rule:

- adjectives

The parliament **voted a new law**.

- quantifiers

We **had a lot of time**.

- other short adverbial expressions before *pronouns* or *numbers*

She **likes almost anybody**.

He could have **spent as much as 15 years** in prison.

NOUN CLAUSES AND INDIRECT QUESTIONS

The word order is:

- the normal *affirmative* order

Right: We soon found **what the problem was**.

Wrong: We soon found what was the problem.

Right: Do you know **what time it is**?

Wrong: Do you know what time is it?

COMBINING ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

When adjectives are chained together:

- the most subjective adjective comes first, followed by adjectives describing properties, colours, and finally materials and essential qualities

He always wears **a dirty old cotton pullover**.

They have **an adorable little black Rottweiler puppy**.

Like individual adjectives:

- adverb / adjective combinations come before the noun

Right: *It was a very difficult journey.*

Wrong: *It was a journey very difficult.*

Right: *She's an extremely intelligent young girl.*

Wrong: *She's a young girl, extremely intelligent.*

FREQUENCY ADVERBS

The normal position is:

- before the verb

The family often goes camping.

- after the verb 'be'

He is never late for work.

- after the auxiliary in compound verbs

She has usually been right.

PREPOSITION AND ADVERB EXPRESSIONS

The normal order is:

- place and direction before frequency and time

He works at the supermarket four days a week.

I'm going to a meeting at two o'clock.

SPECIFIC WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS

Note the following:

- common negatives

Right: *Not everybody is rich like you.*

Wrong: *Everybody is not rich like you.*

- ordinals and cardinals

Right: *The first three people got a prize.*

Wrong: *The three first people got a prize.*

The position of 'enough':

- before nouns

Right: *We have enough time.*

Wrong: *We have time enough*

- after adjectives and adverbs

Right: *I'm tired enough already.*

Wrong: *I'm enough tired already.*

Right: *Nobody reacted quickly enough.*

Wrong: *Nobody reacted enough quickly.*

Exercise 1

Is the word order in these sentences correct or incorrect? Correct any errors.

1. We grow in our garden tomatoes.
2. Can you tell me what he is talking about?
3. The company had for a long time financial problems.
4. I go when I can to the cinema.
5. It's a solution simple, fast and free.
6. He has rarely had a day off work.
7. It is forbidden to sell in Europe these products.
8. There are alternatives less expensive and better.
9. She sold her business last year.
10. I'm nearly always busy at the weekend.

Exercise 2

Which expressions complete the sentences below correctly?

1. A will make electric bikes illegal.
a) new city law
b) city new law
2. Cloud computing services have developed strongly over the
a) few last years
b) last few years
3. The program brings together
a) leading cancer researchers
b) cancer leading researchers
4. The policy aims to get
a) half a million people back to work quickly.
b) quickly half a million people back to work.
5. MegaCorp has
a) subsidiaries on five continents.
b) on five continents subsidiaries.
6. For administrative purposes, we need a
a) paper signed document.
b) signed paper document.

7. The department needs to buy a

- a) \$20,000 MegaCorp machine
- b) machine \$20,000 MegaCorp

8. The patient was fitted with a hand.

- a) robotic Japanese
- b) Japanese robotic

9. Would you mind taking a survey.

- a) lifestyle quick five-minute
- b) quick five-minute lifestyle

10. I learned Spanish with book.

- a) an elementary grammar child's
- b) a child's elementary grammar