

appendix 7 word order

This section summarises the most important rules of English word order.

sentences

The basic word order of English sentences is SUBJECT – VERB – OBJECT.

I play football. (NOT ~~I football play.~~)

Spoken sentences do not always follow this order (see pages 257, 281–288).

People like that I can't stand. Crazy, those kids are.

questions

In questions we usually put an auxiliary verb before the subject (see pages 2–3).

Did you get my message? (NOT ~~Got you my message ...?~~) *Can you swim?*

'Declarative questions' have a different order (see page 286).

This is your car?

Indirect questions usually have the same structure as statements (see page 218).

I asked him how he felt. They wanted to know if I was English.

However, this is not always true in informal speech (see page 223).

I asked him how did he feel. They wanted to know was I English. (informal)

Note the word order in formal and informal **negative questions** (see page 6).

Do you not feel well? (formal) *Don't you feel well?* (informal)

inversion

There are some other cases (besides questions) where the subject-verb order is inverted. For details, see pages 237, 258 and 259.

Had I known, I would have changed my plans. Round the corner came Mrs Lewis.

Under no circumstances can we cash cheques.

adjectives

Adjectives and noun modifiers usually go before, not after, nouns.

an interesting film chocolate cake (NOT ~~cake chocolate~~)

Adjectives, and some noun modifiers, can go after *be*, *seem* and similar verbs.

He seems happy. It's plastic.

Some adjectives only go in one or other place (see page 175).

a live fish. (NOT ~~an alive fish~~) *That fish is alive.* (NOT ~~That fish is live.~~)

For the order of adjectives (e.g. a **small shiny black leather** bag), see page 174.

Some participles, and one or two adjectives, follow nouns in reduced relative clauses (see page 211).

The people questioned had seen nothing. (= 'The people who were questioned ...')

Please ask for full details of the tickets available.

adverbs

Different adverbs can go in different places in a sentence (see pages 179–180).

Tomorrow I'm off to London. I've just had lunch. She's walking very slowly.

They do **not** usually go **between the verb and the object**.

I finished my report yesterday. (NOT ~~I finished yesterday my report.~~)

She speaks Japanese very well. (NOT ~~She speaks very well Japanese.~~)

Note the position of *always* and *never* with imperatives (see page 10).

Always look before you cross the road. (NOT ~~Look always ...~~) *Never give up.*

prepositions

Prepositions often go **at the ends of questions**, especially in speech (see page 3).

Who did you go with? What did you buy that for?

Prepositions can also go **at the ends of passive clauses** and (especially in spoken English) **at the ends of relative clauses** (see pages 79 and 212).

She loves being looked at. There's the woman that I work for.

exclamations

In exclamations, the adjective, adverb or object comes at the beginning of the sentence, just after *how* or *what* (see page 13).

How well she plays! (NOT ~~How she plays well!~~) *What a strange accent he has!*

phrasal verbs

The objects of **phrasal verbs** (but not prepositional verbs) can often go **between the two parts of the verb** (see page 112).

*Can you **switch the lights off**?* (OR *Can you **switch off the lights**?*)

Pronoun objects always go between the two parts of a phrasal verb.

*Please **switch them off**.* (NOT ~~Please switch off them.~~)

quite a etc

Note the position of *a/an* after *quite* and *rather* (see page 307), *such*, *so* and *as* (see page 188).

*It was **quite a** nice day.* *We waited **rather a** long time.*

*She asked **such a** strange question.* *I've never heard **so boring a** lecture.*

*It wasn't **as bad a** journey as I had expected.*

verbs with two objects

Some verbs that have two objects can be followed by **indirect object + direct object**. Others can't (see page 118).

*I sent **everybody the details**.* (BUT NOT ~~I explained everybody the details.~~)

so do I etc

Note the word order in structures like **so do I**, **nor do I** (see page 258).

*My sister works in a bank, and **so do I**.* (NOT ... ~~so I do.~~)

*I'm not convinced by your arguments, and **nor are the others**.*

ago

Ago follows an expression of **time**.

*I got here **three days ago**.* (NOT ... ~~ago three days~~)

enough

Enough usually goes **before nouns** but **after adjectives and adverbs**.

*There isn't **enough time**.* (NOT ... ~~time enough~~)

*Is the room **warm enough**?* (NOT ... ~~enough warm?~~) *I didn't shout **loud enough**.*