

I: Verb and Object

Generally English tries not to place any words between verb and object. Compare the following alternatives:

- 1a. *We see very often such sights.
- 1b. We very often see such sights.

Only **1b** reads like English.

Improve the following sentences:

1. Such eyesores represent generally the tasteless architecture of the past.
2. Few politicians enjoy in reality any privacy.
3. The young generation does have role models that influence profoundly teenagers.
4. Those are the boys who killed in cold blood a two-year-old child.
5. A good teacher can make you adore for example physics, even if you loathed the subject sincerely before.
6. They want for their children the best.
7. The news is full of various conflicts tormenting now that continent.
8. A friend whom Diana had trusted made out of publishing untrue or half-true stories about her a small fortune.
9. One may see here many interesting exhibits.
10. He says that while he likes the USA, he can do in Central and Eastern Europe much more.
11. TV affects tremendously our lives.
12. Man usually considers himself superior, calling himself conceitedly 'homo sapiens'.
13. John realises perfectly well this fact.
14. If you were to ask such people, they would probably put after a moment's hesitation money at the top of their list of priorities.
15. We have improved considerably our safety precautions.

II: Main and Subordinate Clauses

When the main clause of a sentence is preceded by a subordinate clause, it is not likely to begin with anything other than the subject of the main verb. Let us compare the following alternative sentences:

- 1a. *Now that the bureaucratic problems have been overcome, this spring they'll be getting married.
- 1b. Now that the bureaucratic problems have been overcome, they'll be getting married this spring.

1a is hardly English, since an initial subordinate clause (*Now that the bureaucratic hurdles have been overcome*) and the subject of the main verb (*they*) are separated by the phrase *this spring*. If, however, we were to remove the first clause, the second clause of **1a** could remain unchanged:

This spring they'll be getting married.

The same remarks might be made of the following alternative sentences:

- 2a. *Though we are aware that appearances can lie, in most cases it is difficult not to judge by them.
- 2b. Though we are aware that appearances can lie, it is difficult in most cases not to judge by them.

In **2a** an initial subordinate clause and the subject of the main verb (*it*) are separated by the phrase *in most cases*. If, however, we were to remove the *though*-clause, the second clause of **2a** could remain unchanged:

In most cases it is difficult not to judge by them.

Improve the following sentences in the same way:

1. Although the RSC is perceived as exclusively producing Shakespeare, in fact their programme includes classical theatre of all periods.
2. As we grow up and face more and more moral dilemmas, no longer can we condemn such behaviour.
3. Had it not been for such events, perhaps we would now be living in a completely different reality.
4. When we cross the threshold of parenthood, simultaneously we cross the threshold of the generation gap.
5. While in the initial stages training was focussed mainly on traditional banking, gradually the course came to include other areas.

6. Although the majority of people have chosen to live in small units, in some regions there is still a tendency towards preserving extended families.
7. As I am not a music lover, frequently my dislike of concerts has led to serious quarrels between us both.
8. Founded by 12 countries in Washington in 1949, initially NATO was a military alliance against the USSR.
9. As most would agree, to a certain extent it depends on ourselves in what way we are influenced by the mass media.
10. If a child is deprived of the possibility of imitating grown-ups, as an adult he or she will probably find it difficult to perform the role of parent.
11. Although he offers a plausible theory, unfortunately he sometimes borders on fantasy.
12. When it comes to politics, after many years of unbridled capitalism our country seems finally to have established its own middle way.
13. Sad as it may seem, so far nothing has been done to eliminate this problem.

III: Absence of Parallel Structure

Parallelism of Structure

If we look at the following sentence, we will again notice an absence of parallelism in the form of a gratuitous repetition of *about*:

7. *I have a cousin in America who never forgets about Welsh traditions, St David's Day, or even about the annual Eisteddfod.

The sentence can easily be corrected by removal of the underlined word.

The following (8a) is yet another type of frequently occurring mistake:

- 8a. *Nobody imagined that TV sets would be found in every house and millions of people would be able to watch the same pictures.
 8b. Nobody imagined that TV sets would be found in every house and that millions of people would be able to watch the same pictures.

Here again common sense would suggest the insertion of *that* to bring out the parallelism of structure (8b).

Improve the following sentences, creating parallelism of structure where appropriate:

1. By introducing a common currency and elimination of international barriers the countries of Western Europe became integrated in terms of economics, trade, and to some extent in terms of culture.
2. Democracy does not imply equality or being wealthy.
3. Everyone, whether unabashed atheist or Catholic clergy, speaks with one voice on this issue.
4. Teachers are often too tired and busy to meet their students, help them, talk to them, or even sometimes to prepare for lessons.
5. In the course of time they lost their independence, culture and their identity.
6. The question is whether these reforms will exacerbate social divisions and will they harm the poor.
7. For a miracle to be truly valid, the cure must be immediate, absolute, and must still be effective after ten years.
8. Are parents only to blame, or perhaps the fault lies with society as a whole?
9. Many young people squander their chances of educating themselves, finding a job and, most importantly, of enjoying a high standard of living.
10. No conflict threatens the European and world's status quo to such a degree.
11. A proper diet, a balanced life style, practising sports and avoiding addictions are associated with longevity.
12. In America petrol is relatively cheap, and the average American can afford to buy much more petrol with his salary than the average man in Europe.
13. All things considered, the railway is neither better nor worse than driving a car or going by bus.
14. She received the Nobel Prize for her research into methods of separation, purifying and measurement of activity of radioactive elements.
15. The author's intention was not only to attack social hypocrisies but also an appeal for greater humanity.
16. Languages are disparate not only in regard to grammar and vocabulary but also they differ phonetically.

17. We need a person who is not afraid of responsibility and making important decisions.
18. We knew that everyone important, whether British or from America, would be at the meeting.
19. Many people merely show their respect for convention rather than they really believe in God.

IV: 'Dangling Participles'

A 'dangling participle' is one that, when referred to its grammatical subject, makes nonsense. Let us look at the following sentence:

- 1a. *Not knowing British history, the phenomenon of devotion to the monarchy might seem rather anachronistic.

If we look at the participle *Not knowing*, we will see that its grammatical subject is none other than the subject of the main verb, namely *the phenomenon of devotion to the monarchy*, although that was not what the writer intended. There are several ways of correcting the sentence, two of the most obvious being:

- 1b. To anyone not knowing British history the phenomenon of devotion to the monarchy might seem rather anachronistic.
 1c. Not knowing British history one might find the phenomenon of devotion to the monarchy rather anachronistic.

A closely related phenomenon involves a special type of clause beginning with *when*, *while* or *though*:

- 2a. *A number of problems are likely to present themselves while trying to obtain a British visa.

Again the subject of *while trying* should be the same as the subject of the main verb. The sentence needs reformulating:

- 2b. A number of problems are likely to present themselves to anyone trying to obtain a British visa.
 2c. One is likely to encounter a number of problems while trying to obtain a British visa.

Correct the following sentences in any of the ways suggested above:

1. Examining the influence of TV one important question arises.
2. When visiting Britain's former colonies it is still possible to come across many residences in the neoclassical style.
3. Observing the sheer variety of opinions on the subject, it is hard to see even the beginnings of any consensus.
4. Having attained such a rank, it is common practice to abuse the power and status that go with it.
5. Though called an 'eater of time', I would go so far as to claim that TV is a necessary source of information as well as entertainment.

V: Abrupt Sentence Endings

A very common mistake is to end a sentence with an abrupt or otherwise awkward word or phrase. One especially frequent variant is a very abrupt predicate, as in the following sentence:

- 1a. *The problem of how best to divide up the profits arose.

Here the predicate *arose* consists of one word, coming after a subject of many words. Many British people would consider the sentence awkward and difficult to read. Yet if the predicate were longer, the sentence would be unobjectionable:

- 1b. The problem of how best to divide up the profits was discussed by all concerned.

Alternatively the sentence can be reorganised, for example in the following manner:

- 1c. The problem arose of how best to divide up the profits.

Now compare the following alternatives:

- 2a. *The following year Russell's most important contribution to science, *The Principles of Mathematics*, appeared.
 2b. The following year saw the appearance of Russell's most important contribution to science, namely....

Thus an abrupt predicate (*appeared*) has been avoided by means of a rephrasing.

Improve the following sentences by changing the word order and if necessary by rephrasing them.

1. Another typical example of keeping local traditions in our country is Easter.
2. Urgent action to improve this intolerable and inexcusable situation is necessary.
3. It was against this background that the idea of writing a modern history of England, highlighting the role of Parliament, emerged.
4. Documentaries which focus on some aspects of man's cultural and social activities or those which examine the existence of some wild animals in their natural habitats may broaden our minds.
5. Opinions as to whether the private lives of politicians should be subject to the same ethical rules as their public lives may differ.
6. Many years have passed since the famous Round Table talks, which are considered to have been the beginning of the end of communist domination, took place.
7. Observing five-year-olds who can only think about new computer games and who perceive reality only through a monitor screen, is sad.

VI: *IT* vs. *THIS*

Written English very often avoids *it* in favour of *this* or *that*. Compare the following alternatives:

1. There are good reasons to postulate that ethical values will differ across majors due to their intrinsic nature and the type of activities they entail. **It is** because students can be generally expected to match their values to their major they aspire to work in.
2. There are good reasons to postulate that ethical values will differ across majors due to their intrinsic nature and the type of activities they entail. **This is** because students can be generally expected to match their values to their major they aspire to work in.

Decide in which sentences *it* should be replaced with *this*.

1. Legal regulations should be introduced obliging firms to set aside some of their profits for the further training of employees. **It** would make employers more aware of the importance of professional development.
2. We have coded linguistic metaphor at the level of words, but **it** does not mean that we see metaphor only as a matter of single words.
3. While prototyping was a common and accepted design approach at the time, **it** proved to be time-consuming and costly.
4. Technology and globalization have caused some service jobs, such as call-center operators and check processors, to be downsized, but in other areas these large forces play at best minor roles. Service jobs in the hotel industry are good examples of **it**.
5. The paucity of information is in part the result of early views that collecting trips to peat swamp forests were a waste of time because of their low animal diversity and abundance. **It**, coupled with the extremely difficult logistics posed by swampy conditions, has until recently discouraged biologists from survey work.
6. Change itself is not seen as damaging; it is our resistance to **it** that causes suffering.