

Advanced Tips for Writing in English as a Second Language

Here are a few “rules” that can help you write more complex sentences and improve your texts.

- 1. Indirect/embedded questions:** In direct questions, the subject and the verb are inverted (e.g. “**Are verbally fluent students** more interested in intellectual matters and demonstrating a high degree of intelligence?”). Indirect questions follow the standard word order (i.e. subject-verb) and end with a period rather than a question mark. Insert the words *if* or *whether* before the question. If the original question already contains a conjunction (when, because, etc.) or an interrogative pronoun/adjective (what, who, why, how, etc.), keep it. Adjust all tenses and pronouns.

Examples:

“He asked **why verbally fluent students were** more interested in intellectual matters and demonstrating a higher degree of intelligence.”

“Rodney phoned. He wants to know **what you want on tomorrow's front page**. And Miss Wallace wants to know **if she should allow Rodney to continue using your office for the news meetings**.” (Elizabeth George, *In the Presence of the Enemy*. Bantam, 1996)

Try it:

- “What will the price of oil be next year?” -> *It is unclear **what the price of oil will be** next year.*
- “Is it possible to develop a reliable earthquake warning system?” -> The question remains whether
- “How is this policy implemented in rural areas?” -> Current studies provide little information on ...
- “To what extent is persistence a major factor in graduate student success?” -> It might be interesting to know...
- “What are the differences between electrical engineering and electronic engineering?” -> A questionnaire was distributed in order to determine...

- 2. Unreal conditional:** There are 4 types of conditional structures. You may use these types of structures when evaluating journal articles, methods or theoretical models used in a particular study, or previous research conclusions. Note: *should* expresses a strongly negative comment, while *would* and *could* are less strong. *Should have* is a criticism, *could have* is a suggestion/regret, and *might have* is a weak suggestion.
 - Conditional zero expresses a statement that is generally or always true and uses the present tense or imperative (e.g. “*If the cost of designing and developing a complex integrated circuit is too high, **spread** it across millions of production units.*”)

- Conditional one expresses a real possibility and uses the present and the future (e.g. “*If the controllers **are** correctly designed, dynamic systems **will behave** in the desired manner.*”)
- Conditional two expresses an unreal/improbable possibility and uses the simple past and would+verb (e.g. “*If researchers today **tried** experiments that caused extreme emotional stress to the participants, these studies **would violate** the Canadian Code of Conduct for Research Involving Humans.*”)
- Conditional three expresses a regret, something unreal, and uses the past perfect and would/could/should+have+past participle of the verb (e.g. “*This article **could have been** more persuasive if the author **had related** the findings to previous work on the topic.*”)

Try it:

- “TESOL methodologies in the last four decades have successfully upheld classroom monolingualism.” -> If there had not been a pedagogical reaction to grammar-translation methods in the 1970’s...
- “Researchers are beginning to differentiate between the language-translation method and the use of local resources to scaffold learning in content classrooms.” -> The use of local resources to scaffold learning would not be happening if researchers...
- “The banking model of language learning and teaching complemented global capitalism.” -> If there had not been capitalism, ...

- 3. Inversions (emphatic sentences):** You already know that English usually requires an inverted word order for questions. You also probably know that a different word order is required if a “negative” word is used in a sentence.

Example: “***Not only has the author** presented some valuable new information, he has also presented it in a very clear and coherent manner.*”

Example: “***In no case do the authors** provide any statistical information about their results.*”

Notice how the auxiliary verb precedes the subject, as in a question. Now look at this statement, first inverted, then in normal word order:

Inverted word order: “***Particularly prominent were** functional strategies...*”

Normal word order: “***Functional strategies... were** particularly prominent.*”

This kind of inversion occurs with expressions that are emphatic (e.g., “particularly”) or comparative (e.g., “even more”). It is a strong highlighting device and should only be used for special emphasis, as when we want to single out *one* result/fault/problem from many others.

Six typical expressions follow. Try to complete them: “particularly important...” “Especially interesting...” “Much less expected...” “Rather more significant...” “Especially noteworthy...” “Of great concern...”