



**IIT Madras**  
ONLINE DEGREE

# **WORD ORDER**

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Word order, which word can come after which word, is fixed in English.

- In English, a question sentence, also called “Interrogative Sentence”, begins either only with “Is/Are/Am/Was/Were/Will...”, etc. or with “What / When/ where / which / who / why...?”, etc.

- You must first have Noun working as subject, then verb followed by object / complement.

English is a Subject – verb – Object (S – V – O) language.

Eg. *John drives a car.*

You cannot say any of the following :

*\*John a car drive*

*\*A car John drives*

*\*Drives John a car.*

*\*shows ungrammatical sentence.*

- In many other languages, word order is not so rigidly fixed. In Hindi or Tamil, for instance, one can say SOMETHING LIKE the following :

*John a car drives.*

*A car John drives.*

*Drives John a car.*

- In, phrase, clause, sentence, at all levels, and in all kinds of sentences, word order is almost fixed in English.
- Almost any two words or more come together in English only in a certain order.
- For instance, you can only say “a car”; you cannot say \**“car a”*.
- If you have “ a red car”, then again the order is fixed; you cannot put these words together in any other way.
- If it takes an adjective after itself, then it can come only as another phrase, such as in “ a car of red colour”, or “a car coloured red” , etc. Ordinarily, adjectives precede nouns in English.

Even among adjectives, the order is fixed.

- If you have two adjectives, “costly” and “new” before the noun ”car”, then you can only say “costly new car”, and not “new costly car”.
- If you have three or four adjectives before noun, even then the order is fixed. You generally say “costly new Maruti car” you do not say “Maruti new costly car”, etc.

# ACTIVITY 1

The following words have been jumbled.  
Reorganize them in the acceptable order for  
English.

- a. my all books,
- b. teenaged only boys,
- c. rosewood old bookshelves,
- d. the selected all players



# ANSWERS

- a. All my books.
- b. only teenaged boys,
- c. old rosewood bookshelves,
- d. all the selected players

- Word order is fixed also for noun + noun, such as “class room”, “History teacher”, “Stations Master”, “Assistant Station Master”, “Physics Laboratory”, “Boys’ Hostel”, “Night Express”, etc.

The principle is to go from modifier to the modified. So if the “history” is not of the teacher, teacher teaches history, then history modifies “teacher”. You can ask which teacher, and the answer is “history teacher”.

# ACTIVITY 2

Words are jumbled in some of the following phrases.  
Reorganize them in the acceptable order.

- a. laboratory transfer heat,
- b. spoon coffee,
- c. hockey girls team,
- d. garden children's,
- e. board school secondary education

# ANSWERS

- a. Heat Transfer Laboratory,
- b. Coffee spoon,
- c. Girls' Hockey Team,
- d. Children's Garden,
- e. Secondary School Education Board

You can also have two nouns joined by a preposition.  
For instance,

- King of England
- Captain of the team
- Gun of the soldier
- Biscuit for dog
- Car in the garage

The head of the Noun Phrase comes first. Modifiers joined by prepositions or otherwise follow.

Word order is fixed also among verbs.

- If you have two or three words together making verbal group, such as

“John has been driving car since morning”, then “has been driving” is a verbal group, where “has” comes first, followed by “been” which shows a time coming from the past, then you can bring main verb, in this case “drive”, and to show that the action continues you can attach “-ing” at the end of the main verb, not at its beginning, so you have “has been driving”; you cannot say the following:

- \*has been ingdrive, or
- \*been drive hasing, or
- \*drive beening has, etc.

A common general principle is to show time of action unambiguously, so you begin with tense and end it in the present time. For example, see the following:

- a. It has been raining (since yesterday).
- b. Robert has lived in Chennai (for decades).
- c. Crops have been destroyed by floods or droughts.
- d. Moral education had been given an important place in education.
- e. The train is running to time.

- Even without words like “since yesterday” and “for decades”, we know that the speaker means to say that it has been raining since some time in the past, and that John has lived in Chennai for a period of time.
- Word order is generally fixed even in the verbal group of words.

You have tense (present/past) followed by aspect (has/have or had), voice (active/passive), and then simple/progressive (v+ing).



# ACTIVITY 3

Reorganize the sentence from the jumbled words given below:

*a. served are treats*

*b. exchanged presents are*

*c. houses flowers adorn*

d. be brilliantly could he It not said shone that

# ANSWERS

- a. Treats are served.*
- b. Presents are exchanged.*
- c. Flowers adorn house.*
- d. It could not be said that he shone brilliantly.

- An adverb qualifies adjectives and verbs, such as in the following sentences.

Swaminathan is a very good boy. He gets up early in the morning, and begins his studies immediately.

- In the sentences above, underlined words are adverbs.
- They qualify either adjectives, as “very” before “good”.
- In the first sentence, or they qualify verbs, as “early in the morning” qualifies “gets up”, and “immediately” qualifies “begins”.
- The first adverb intensifies goodness; how good is Swaminathan? He is very good. Similarly, when does he get up? The answer is “early in the morning”. When does he begin his studies? The answer is immediately. So adverb qualifies adjectives and verbs.

- For adjectives, an adverb is an intensifier. You can, for instance, say, “Radha is very pretty.” One might ask “how pretty?”, the answer is “very”.
- For verbs, it indicates manner, purpose and/or reason, place and many shades of time, like duration, frequency, etc. You can imagine a sentence such as follows. “The night mail from New Delhi arrived late at Secunderabad due to fog this morning.”
- All the underlined words perform the work of an adverb, just as very does in the first sentence. They indicate manner, reason/purpose, place and time.

# ACTIVITY 4

Look at the following sentences. Identify the adverb within them. Adverb includes words that indicate manner, place, purpose, time etc.

- a. Patients wait outside.
- b. Doctors work inside.
- c. Patients go inside when called.
- d. Doctors hardly speak to the patients.
- e. Sometimes they speak to the patients very briefly.
- f. They are very busy, they are always short of time.
- g. Nurses answer patients' questions more elaborately.
- h. Hospitals work non-stop in India to comfort the suffering and to answer emergency without delay.

# ANSWERS

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# ADDITIONAL EXERCISE

Put the verb into the correct form, -ing or to. Either form is also possible:

- a. The curtain is dirty. They need ..... . (clean)
- b. Whenever I see this comedian, I can't help..... (smile)
- c. Reena never wears sunglasses. She doesn't like .....  
sunglasses.(wear)
- d. I regret ..... that we are going to have a cyclonic storm this  
evening. (say)
- e. Ananya has been ill but now she's beginning ..... better. (get)



# ANSWERS

- a. cleaning
- b. smiling
- c. wearing/to wear
- d. to say
- e. to get

**Thank You!**