

Organising information

PART 1

AGiU, Units 95-100

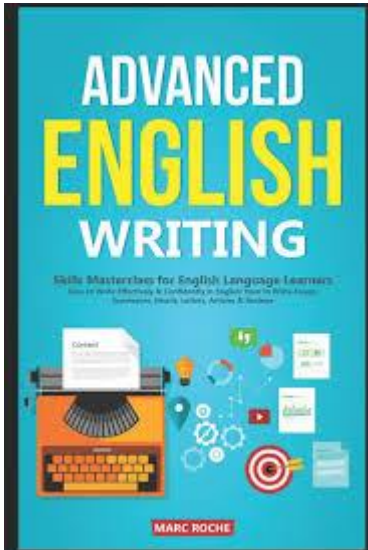
Oxford English Grammar Course (Advanced): 257-61.

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INTRODUCTION

Why is information structure so important?



“Previous research has shown that **information structure management** is problematic even for **advanced L2 learners**, and that they have limited awareness of the appropriate use of lexical and syntactic **focusing** devices in formal and informal registers in the spoken and written mode”
(Callies 2009: 2)”.



Information structure: main concepts

- **The principle of end-focus:** most important information comes at the end and receives prominence (marked by stress or special emphasis)
- The **information principle** (*given + new*)
- The **weight principle** or principle of end-weight (*light + heavy*)

Information principle & end-focus (Biber et al 1999: 896)

- In English, and in many other languages, the tendency is for **given** information to be followed by **new** information (i.e. information which is not recoverable from the preceding discourse).
- This links sentences together more tightly and produces a text that is easier to read.
- **New** information tends to receive prominence, hence **end-focus**.

The weight-principle/principle of end-weight

- The weight principle, or principle of increasing constituents: shorter (lighter) constituents precede longer (heavier) ones.
 - a **universal** principle
 - based on the notion of **syntactic weight** → in terms of the **length** (number of syllables or words) and/or the morphosyntactic **complexity** of sentence constituents.
 - **End-weight**: In English long and complex constituents are placed towards the end of a clause, otherwise a sentence may sound awkward and unbalanced.

These principles play a major role in word order alternations and weight-sensitive constructions:

- **Extraposition:**
 - The fact that many doctors who came to Finland in the 1960's had to start their medical studies over from the beginning in order to be licensed to practice here is unfortunate. → **It is unfortunate that many doctors who came to Finland....**
- **Existential sentences: there**
 - Many people who believe that the recent warming of the climate is due to the greenhouse effect exist → **There are many people who believe that...**
- **Clefting**
- What he saw was a man of about sixty years, older than he had expected, but still hale, and of a powerful frame. (Callies 2009:41) (heavy NP in focus position)
- **Inversion:** (long subject with new information in end position)
 - *At stake for the day were 22 national convention delegates – as well as incalculable political momentum in the contest to pick a Democratic challenger for President Bush* (Callies 2009: 33)

- **Other constructions affected by these principles:**
 - verb-particle alternations
 - We'll have to *put* the next meeting of the General Assembly *off* → We'll have to *put off* the next meeting of the General Assembly.
 - The so-called dative-alternations:
 - I gave the officer who had been recently appointed by the minister the bad news → I gave the bad news to the officer who had....

EXISTENTIAL THERE- CONSTRUCTIONS

Unit 95. *There is/are*, etc.

- Used to introduce **topics**.
- The **noun** after *there + be* often has an **indefinite** or non-specific meaning (*a/an*, *zero article*, *any(one)*, etc.) (A):
 - There was **a** cat in the kitchen.
 - BUT: *there + be + the* → **change of topic**
 - And... there is **the** question of who is going to pay.
- Agreement with following noun. **Exceptions** (B):
 - **There's** some apples on the table. INFORMAL.
 - There **was** only **a bottle of milk**, some eggs, and **butter**. 2 OR MORE NOUNS IN A LIST; AGREEMENT WITH FIRST NOUN.

Unit 95. *There is/are, etc.*

- *There* + other verbs indicating existence: *arise, emerge, exist, remain...* (A)
 - During the 1990s, **there arose** a demand for organic food.
- *There used to be/supposed to be/tends to be/appears to be/seems to be...* (A)
- FORMAL ENGLISH (D):
 - **There being** no evidence against him, he was released (=Because there was no evidence...).

EXTRAPOSITION

Unit 96. Extraposition 1 (*It is illegal to...*)

SUBJECT EXTRAPOSITION

- Introductory ***it*** is used: (A)
 - To place **long or complex** elements at the end:
 - It is illegal **to drive without a licence**.
 - To focus **attention** on something by putting it at the end:
 - It is a miracle **that he wasn't hurt** (Information principle).
- ***It is + adjective/noun + that-clause/to-infinitive clause/wh-clause/-ing clause*** as subject: (A)
 - It is clear **why he didn't resign**.
 - It is useless **asking Sophie to help**.

Unit 96. Extraposition 1 (*It is illegal to...*)

- **Other combinations:**
 - When you have a headache, **it helps** *to lie down*.
 - **It shocked** *him to see* her looking so ill.
 - **It takes** *a lot of effort to play* the flute.
 - **It seems** *that she has lost* her memory.
 - **It** suddenly **hit** *me that* Sarah wanted to borrow money.
 - **It is said** *that he is a good person*.
- Extraposition is NOT an alternative to a noun as subject:
 - Their success was unexpected.
 - Not: ~~It was unexpected their success.~~

Unit 96. Extraposition 1 (*It is illegal to...*)

96.1

Rewrite these sentences beginning **It ...** but only if they would be correct written English; otherwise write ✓ and consider why an **It ...** sentence would be inappropriate. **A & C**



1 That we continue to monitor the situation is important.

It is important that we continue to monitor the situation.

2 How he stared straight at me was unsettling.

3 Francesco's excellent exam result was surprising.

4 To be a qualified driver is an advantage in the job.

5 Her proposal is quite radical.

6 To put carpet on walls is highly unusual.

7 Robin's new car is a Ferrari.

8 Finding a good plumber is hard these days.

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- 6 To put carpet on walls is highly unusual.
- 7 Robin's new car is a Ferrari.
- 8 Finding a good plumber is hard these days.

2. It was unsettling how he stared straight at me.
3. ✓ (In spoken English, 'It was surprising, F's excellent exam result').
4. It is an advantage in the job to be a qualified driver.
5. ✓ (In spoken English, 'It is quite radical, her proposal').
6. It is highly unusual to put carpet on walls.
7. ✓ (In spoken English, 'It's a Ferrari, Robin's new car').
8. It is hard finding a good plumber ... (or It is hard to find ...).

Unit 96. Extraposition 1 (*It is illegal to...*)

96.2

Complete the sentences using **it ...** followed by a verb from (i) and an expanded form of the notes in (ii). Include an appropriate object where necessary. **B**

(i)

~~appear~~
not bother
hurt
pay
upset

astonish
concern
not do
strike
scare

(ii)

pedal / bicycle
see / carrying knives
criticise / too much
everyone / see in
he / jealous

~~seriously injured / back~~
plan your journey ahead
hadn't even told / when / going away
discover / also / successful novelist
hear / offended

- 1 When Laura fell heavily and lay completely still,
it appeared that she had seriously injured her back
- 2 I knew that Lotta was a journalist for the local paper, but ...
- 3 Since I broke my ankle last year, ...
- 4 I told Peter that I had invited Hugo, too. When he became angry ...
- 5 My comment about Ben's baldness was only meant as a joke and ...

2. ... it astonished me to discover (that) she was also a successful novelist.
3. ... it hurts/has hurt (me) to pedal my bicycle.
4. ... it struck me (that) he was jealous
5. ... it concerned/upset me to hear (that) he was offended.

Unit 97. Extraposition 2 (*I hate it that...*)

OBJECT EXTRAPOSITION

- ***IT*** = object of a verb, and it refers forward to a clause.
 - After ***can't bear, hate, like, love, resent, can't stand, dislike, enjoy, prefer, understand***:
 - I hate ***it that*** you can swim so well and I can't (***not*** *I hate that you can swim so well...).
 - We always enjoy ***it when*** they stay with us.
- Other combinations
 - + adjective: They believe ***it unlikely that*** any lasting damage to the environment has been done.
 - + *to somebody* + *to-inf.*: Leave ***it to me to*** sort out.
 - + *as* + *noun/adj.*: We see ***it as an insult to have*** received no reply to our letter.

Units 97. Extraposition 2 (*I hate it that...*)

D

It is / was no ... vs There is / was no ...

Here are some common expressions including **It is / was no ...** and **There is / was no ...**:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> It's no secret that he wants a new job.<input type="checkbox"/> It's no surprise that his latest film has been so successful.<input type="checkbox"/> It's no use telling me now. I needed to know a week ago.<input type="checkbox"/> It's no good getting angry. That won't help solve the problem.<input type="checkbox"/> It's no coincidence (<i>or accident</i>) that they left the party at the same time.<input type="checkbox"/> It's no longer necessary to have a visa to visit the country. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> There's no denying that he's intelligent.<input type="checkbox"/> I'm afraid there's no alternative (<i>or choice</i>) but to ask her to leave.<input type="checkbox"/> There's no hope of getting more money.<input type="checkbox"/> There's no need to explain how it works; I'll read the manual.<input type="checkbox"/> There's no point in buying an ice-cream maker unless you plan to use it a lot.<input type="checkbox"/> There's no question of agreeing to his demands.<input type="checkbox"/> There's no reason to be pessimistic.<input type="checkbox"/> There's no chance of finding a cure if we don't fund more research. |
|---|---|

The sentences with **It is / was no ...** have alternatives in which the **that-**, **-ing** or **to-infinitive** clause is placed at the front, but the sentences with **There is / was no ...** do not. Compare:

- ☐ **It's no secret** that he wants a new job. (*or That he wants a new job is no secret.*) *and*
- ☐ **There's no denying** that he's intelligent. (*but not That he's intelligent is no denying.*)

Units 97. Extraposition 2 (*I hate it that...*)

97.1 Complete each sentence with an appropriate form of a verb from the box. If necessary, add it.

A & B

~~can't bear~~ consider discover enjoy find
leave owe predict prefer remember

- 1 She can't bear it when people criticise her work, and she gets very upset.
- 2 I hard to understand why the film was made in black and white and not colour.
- 3 If you that you can't get to the meeting on the 16th I'll try to rearrange it.
- 4 We to our supporters to play to the best of our ability in the match.
- 5 I that the camera was on the table when I left the house.
- 6 I really when the weather's hot like this. I'd hate to live in a cold climate.
- 7 I can't stop you dismantling your motorbike in the kitchen, but I'd if you didn't.
- 8 I think we should to the children to do the washing up.
- 9 I that Randa will withdraw from the course within a month.
- 10 I a privilege to have known Mark Jennings.

97.3 Complete the sentences with an appropriate **it ...** or **there ...** phrase from section D opposite. Suggest alternatives where possible. **D**

- 1 It's no coincidence that Karlsbad has won the ice hockey tournament for the last three years. It is a very rich club and its training facilities are excellent.
- 2 My contact lens must have fallen out in the snow, so of finding it.
- 3 that Julia and Jakub have split up. Everyone in the office knows.
- 4 I know your exam result wasn't good, but getting depressed about it.
- 5 Your broken arm will take some time to mend, but why you shouldn't be playing tennis again by the summer.

Units 97. Extraposition 2 (*I hate it that...*)

97.1

Complete each sentence with an appropriate form of a verb from the box. If necessary, add it.

A & B

~~can't bear~~ consider discover enjoy find
leave owe predict prefer remember

- 1 She can't bear it when people criticise her work, and she gets very upset.
- 2 I find it hard to understand why the film was made in black and white and not colour.
- 3 If you discover that you can't get to the meeting on the 16th I'll try to rearrange it.
- 4 We owe it to our supporters to play to the best of our ability in the match.
- 5 I remember that the camera was on the table when I left the house.
- 6 I really enjoy it when the weather's hot like this. I'd hate to live in a cold climate.
- 7 I can't stop you dismantling your motorbike in the kitchen, but I'd prefer it if you didn't.
- 8 I think we should leave it to the children to do the washing up.
- 9 I predict that Randa will withdraw from the course within a month.
- 10 I consider it a privilege to have known Mark Jennings.

97.3

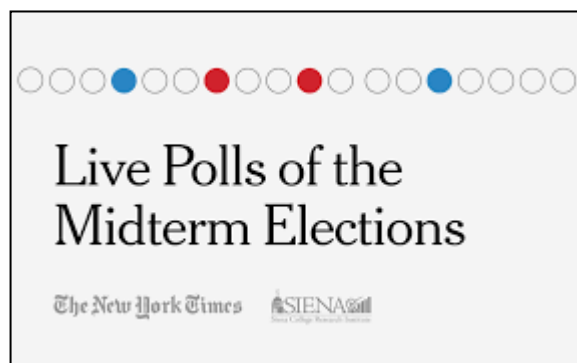
Complete the sentences with an appropriate **it ...** or **there ...** phrase from section D opposite.

Suggest alternatives where possible. **D**

- 1 It's no coincidence that Karlsbad has won the ice hockey tournament for the last three years. It is a very rich club and its training facilities are excellent.
- 2 My contact lens must have fallen out in the snow, so there's no hope/chance of finding it.
- 3 It's no secret that Julia and Jakub have split up. Everyone in the office knows.
- 4 I know your exam result wasn't good, but it's no good (*) getting depressed about it.
- 5 Your broken arm will take some time to mend, but there's no reason why you shouldn't be playing tennis again by the summer.

*4) Also: There's no point

Searching activity



Read these week's press on the US election and find examples of:

- **Existential-there constructions:**
 - With verbs different from BE
 - Where there is not agreement in number with the following NP (e.g. *There's some apples*)
- **Extraposition:**
 - Subject and object extraposition
 - Examples where verbs other than BE are used (e.g. *It suddenly hit me that Sarah wanted to borrow money*)
- **SEND YOUR ANSWERS TO THE GRAMMAR FORUM!!!**

THANK YOU!