

Word Order- Sentence Positions in English

Word order refers to the way words are arranged in a sentence. The standard word order in English is:

Subject + Verb + Object.

- The sequence of words is critical when communicating in English because it can impact the meaning of what you're trying to say. For example:
 - A. Dropped the boy the ball.
 - B. The boy dropped the ball.
 - C. The ball dropped the boy.
- To determine the proper sequence of words, you need to understand what the subject, verb and object(s) are

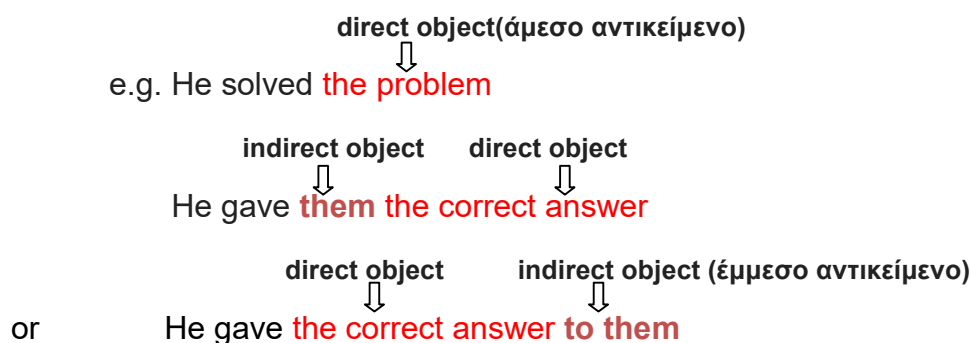
Subject: typically a noun or pronoun—the person, place or thing

Verb: the action or state of being.

Object: the word or group of words influenced by the verb

Verbs can be:

- **linking:** (connect a subject to a quality of that subject)- e.g. Maria is **clever**
- **transitive:** (take direct object/indirect object)



✓ Transitive verbs taking both Direct and Indirect Object:

Bring, buy, cost, get, give, leave, lend, make, offer, owe, pass, pay, play, promise, read, refuse, send, show, sing, take, teach, tell, wish, write

- **intransitive:** (they require nothing to follow them)- e.g. John sleeps

Examples:

subject	verb(s)	object
I	speak	English
I	can speak	English

Position of Time Expressions

(e.g.: recently, now, then, yesterday)

- ✓ Adverbs of time are usually put **at the end of the sentence**.

subject	verb(s)	indirect object	direct object	time
I	will tell	you	the story	tomorrow.

subject	verb(s)	indirect object	direct object	place	time
I	will tell	you	the story	at school	tomorrow.

- ✓ If you **don't want to put emphasis on the time**, you can also put the adverb of time **at the beginning** of the sentence.

time	subject	verb(s)	indirect object	direct object
Tomorrow	I	will tell	you	the story.

- ✓ Note that some time expressions are **adverbs of frequency** (**always, never, usually, etc.**). These are usually put before the main verb (except for 'be' as a main verb).
- ✓

subject	auxiliary/ be	adverb	main verb	object, place or time
I		often	go swimming	in the evenings.
He	doesn't	always	play	tennis.
We	are	usually		here in summer.
I	have	never	been	abroad.

Adverbs of Manner

(e.g.: **slowly, carefully, awfully**)

- ✓ These adverbs are put behind the direct object (or behind the verb if there's no direct object).

subject	verb(s)	direct object	adverb
He	drove	the car	carefully.
He	drove		carefully.

Adverbs of Place

(e.g.: **here, there, behind, above**)

Like adverbs of manner, these adverbs are put behind the direct object or the verb.

subject	verb(s)	direct object	adverb
I	didn't see	him	here.
He	stayed		behind.

subject	verb(s)	indirect object	direct object	manner	place	time
I	will tell	you	the story	thoroughly	at school	tomorrow

Adverbials

Adverbials are words or phrases that provide the information typically provided by adverbs:

When (e.g. yesterday, in the middle of the night, at 5 p.m., during the production, when they left the house)

Where (e.g. there, beside the door, in the shed, following the closure)

How (e.g. quickly, with haste, in confidence, as a beggar)

Why (e.g. because, to apply for the job, for her country's citizens)

- ✓ **Adverbials** are difficult because they **can be placed** in so many **different positions** in a sentence.
- ✓ When changing the placement of an adverbial the emphasis or meaning of a sentence can change as well.

Basic principles for adverb placement

- ✓ Adverbial phrases, which often begin with prepositions (e.g. "in the pantry **beside** the door") **should be placed either at the beginning or end of sentences**, before the subject or after whatever falls in the final sentence position.

- ✓ However, not every sentence follows these rules. The focus of a sentence tends to fall on its end, and to a lesser degree its beginning, so you can generally sneak short adverbials that give useful but unimportant information into the middle of a clause.

Example

In the waiting room, he sat uncomfortably.

He sat in the waiting room uncomfortably. (Notice how “in the waiting room” receives less emphasis here).

He sat uncomfortably in the waiting room.