language notes

European languages organise information in sentences and texts in roughly similar ways, moving from ‘known’ to ‘new’. Students whose languages work differently may still find it difficult to write continuous texts in ways that English-speaking readers find natural.

possible further activities

*Studying text structure*  Get students to look at a passage of a novel or a report, or the text of a song. Ask them to try to see why the sentences begin as they do.

language notes

Not all languages typically begin sentences with the grammatical subject. Some may ‘topicalise’ – bringing some other ‘known’ element to the front (as spoken English often does: see page 257). Speakers of these languages may need practice in choosing appropriate subjects and verbs so that they can begin with ‘known’ information in a way that is natural to written English.

The structure with *have* illustrated here (‘X had something happen to him/her’) is a convenient way of talking about things that happen to people, when neither an ordinary active nor a passive works well.

possible further activities

*The structure with ‘have’: bad experiences*  Get students to write about bad things that have happened to them, using the structure with *have*. For example:

- I had my bicycle stolen last week.
- We had our house broken into while we were on holiday.

possible further activities

*Announcements*  Get students to write the beginnings of brief announcements of a house for sale, a new book or a new film. They should be structured as follows:

1. Name of house/book/film.  2. ‘This …’  3. ‘It …’

For example:

- ‘Rose Cottage. This is a charming 18th-century cottage in excellent condition. It is situated in a quiet village, with good rail and road communications.’
- ‘Screaming Coffins’. This is the latest in Helen Highwater’s gripping series of horror novels. It tells the story of an elderly schoolteacher who …’
- ‘The Young Prince’. This charming biopic is set to smash box-office records. It follows the Prince from his birth in 1998 to …’
language notes

Linking words in European languages work in more or less the same ways, though punctuation may not. Other languages may not have a clear distinction corresponding to that between our conjunctions and adverbs. Speakers of these languages may have quite a lot of difficulty in mastering the English conventions for clause- and sentence-linking.

possible further activities

Checking punctuation  Get students to choose and look at a formal written text of two or three pages – for example an extract from a magazine or a novel. It should have fairly long and complex sentences. Can they find examples of linking adverbs such as however, therefore and the others listed on page 254? What punctuation comes before each – a full stop, a comma, a semi-colon or nothing?

Testing each other  Get students to take a paragraph of continuous formal writing (with reasonably long sentences) and copy it without the punctuation. Make sure there are a number of different texts for the students to work with. They then exchange the results and try to restore the punctuation in each other’s texts.

possible further activities

See the notes for pages 282–283 for practice in fronting in speech.

possible further activities

Split sentences  Copy the following half-sentences (or other similar ones of your choice) on cards, and give them out. Students have to find their other halves.

Under no circumstances | will I vote for the Radical Reactionaries.

Never in her life | had she felt such an immediate attraction for anyone.

Not only | was he good-looking, he was also a wonderful dancer.

Not until the following year | did she find out the reason why he had left.

Hardly had I opened the door | when a massive dog came rushing out.

Round the corner | came Mrs Marriott, like a ship in full sail.

“Go away and stay away!” | screamed Maria.

In front of the temple | stood three colossal statues.

Never in the history of the world | have we faced so many problems.

possible further activities

Mad patriots  Tell students to imagine that they are mad English patriots (or mad patriots of any other nationality they choose). They insist that all the great inventions, discoveries and creations in the history of the world were achieved by their countrymen. Like this:

It was George Smith who built the Eiffel Tower.

It was Shakespeare who discovered America.

It was Mary Jones of Birmingham who invented the motor car.
possible further activities

Personalisation: extending Exercise 2 Get students to write sentences like those in Exercise 2, but about themselves.

pages 262–267

language notes

Actually (page 267) is a ‘false friend’ for speakers of many European languages, in which similar words (actuellement, aktuell etc) mostly mean ‘at present’.

Students may also misunderstand the special concessive use of certainly and it is true that (page 265), thinking that they just have their literal meanings and not realising that they imply a following ‘but’.

possible further activities

Finding discourse markers Get students to look at a few pages of a formal written text – perhaps an article that is setting out an argument. How many discourse markers can they find? They could do the same with a playscript or a radio drama. If students have to listen to lectures in English, get them to note the lecturers’ favourite structuring expressions: ‘Right’ and ‘OK’ are very common.

pages 270–273

possible further activities

Building sentences (This is a repeat of an activity suggested for page 210.) Write the separate parts of the sentences below (or other sentences with a similar structure) on cards. Give out the cards; students then have to go round trying to join up with the two others whose sentence-parts go with theirs. You can make it more challenging if you wish by not using capital letters or full stops.

- The woman | our dog bit | is still in hospital.
- The house | my parents bought 20 years ago | is worth ten times what they paid for it.
- Some students | my brother plays football with | are in trouble with the police.
- A painting | my neighbour found hanging in his attic | has been sold for £50,000.
- Some boxes | a dustman found standing open in the street | contained secret documents.
- Not all of the things | John was taught at school | were useful to him in later life.
- Places | people want to go back to | are often disappointing on a second visit.

Building sentences: reduced relative clauses (This is a repeat of an activity suggested for page 211.) Do the same as in the above exercise, with sentences like these:

- The tiger | seen wandering in the park | had escaped from the city zoo.
- A diamond necklace | found on a table in a burger bar | had been stolen from a local jeweller’s.
- 82 % of the children | questioned | said they did not believe in Father Christmas.
- Police | called to a wedding party | found a fight in progress.
- Most of the people | asked for their opinions | had nothing to say.
- The two children | kidnapped in Berlin last week | have been released unhurt.

Extending Exercises 4–6 Get volunteers to prepare their own versions of Exercises 4–6 and bring them to class for the others to try.

Finding more examples Get students to see if they can find more examples in news reports of the structures practised on these pages.

➔ Section 17 continues
possible further activities

Finding more examples  Get students to see if they can find more examples of complicated noun phrases in advertisements. Estate agents and car dealers are good sources of this sort of language, because they need to get a lot of information into a small space.

language notes

The restrictions on the use of do so are hard to define – the explanation on page 277 gives a rough guide.

possible further activities

Finding sentence beginnings  Get students to try to write beginnings to go with the following endings:

... and I think he will.
... and I know he has.
... so she did.
... but they haven't.
... but we can't.

Scripting dialogues  Get students to work in pairs. Give them two minutes or so to prepare mini-dialogues including one of the following:

I hope to.
I don’t expect to.
She started to.
They never managed to.
I’d love to.
We can’t afford to.
I don’t think you need to.
I used to.
It seems to.
I’m going to.
I meant to, but I forgot.

Scripting dialogues  Get students to work in pairs. Give them two minutes or so to prepare mini-dialogues including one of the following:

I think so
I don’t think so.
I suppose so.
I don’t suppose so.
I don’t expect so.
I hope so.
I hope not.
language notes

There are various grammatical differences between informal speech and formal writing. Many of these are to do with processing: written language can be more dense and complex than speech, because readers, unlike listeners, can process sentences at their own speed and go back over difficult material if necessary. Also, since speakers and listeners are generally in the same situation and place, not so much has to be explained, and words can often be dropped. Because of these differences, many native-speaking children, although they are fluent speakers, find it hard to master the conventions of formal writing. For literate non-native speaking learners of English, the problem is often the opposite. They may be very familiar with the typical structures of written English – these are what is normally taught in textbooks and illustrated in grammars – but they may have learnt little or nothing about spoken sentence structure.

Spoken sentences often begin by ‘fronting’ something that is not the subject (see also page 257). This structure – topicalisation – is rare in written English. While advanced learners don’t necessarily need to produce native-like informal speech, it is important for them to be familiar with the way sentences like these are constructed, so that they can understand them more easily when they hear natural conversational English.

Back at work, then, is she, Maggie?
That discussion, Peter’s new idea, what did you think of it?
Gets on everybody’s nerves, she does.

Note, however, that in some languages (e.g. Japanese) topicalisation is common in writing as well as speech. Speakers of such languages may need to learn not to use these structures in written English. Comparing the grammar of speech and writing will help them in this.

In some cultures written language has very high prestige, and the grammar of informal speech may be regarded as inferior or incorrect. Students from this kind of background may need to be persuaded that the structures discussed here are valid and worth studying in their own right.

possible further activities

Split sentences Write some or all of the following sentence fragments (as many as necessary) on cards, including the numbers. Give out the cards, one to each student. Explain the numbers (for example, a card with ‘2/3’ contains the second part of a three-part sentence). Students go round finding the other parts of their sentences. When they are all ready, they say their sentences. You can follow up by getting students to ‘translate’ their sentences into a more formal style.

1/3 That film
2/3 load of rubbish
3/3 I thought.

1/3 Your sister
2/3 still going out with Pete
3/3 is she?

1/3 Gone back home then
2/3 has he
3/3 your brother?

1/3 Playing football
2/3 this Saturday
3/3 are they?

1/3 Don’t know
2/3 what they’re talking about
3/3 some of these people.

1/3 Never anything good
2/3 on TV
3/3 is there?

1/3 Go swimming
2/3 in the lake this evening
3/3 shall we?

1/3 Going anywhere nice
2/3 for your holiday?

1/3 Where she buys her clothes
2/2 I can’t begin to imagine.

1/6 Monday
2/6 was on my way home
3/6 this guy
4/6 ‘never seen him before in my life’
5/6 he stops me in the street
6/6 and says ‘Hi, John, I need some money’.

➔ Section 17 continues
Speech in films etc  Watch part of a film or a recorded TV sitcom or cartoon with the class and study some of the dialogue. Look for examples of spoken grammar. Are there also examples of unrealistic speech with grammar more typical of written language?

Pages 284–285

Possible further activities

Reply questions  Tell the class some things about yourself (things you’ve done, your family, …). The class respond with reply questions, and you then go on to give a little more information. Like this:

You: I’ve got this funny old aunt.
Class: Have you?
You: Yes, she lives in Berlin …

Scripting dialogues  Get students, in groups of three or four, to prepare, practise and perform dialogues containing examples of all the structures practised here. They will need quite some time to do this. Suggest topics if necessary.

Pages 286–288

Possible further activities

Echo questions  Give the class some surprising pieces of information. They reply with echo questions, questioning either the whole sentence or a part of it. Like this:

‘There’s a squirrel in my bag.’ ‘There’s a what in your bag?’
‘I’ve shot the headmaster.’ ‘You’ve done what?’ / ‘You’ve shot who?’

Scripting dialogues  Get students, in groups of three or four, to prepare, practise and perform dialogues containing examples of all the structures practised here. They will need quite some time to do this. Suggest topics if necessary.

Page 289

Possible further activities

Formal and Informal requests  Get students to prepare pairs of very short mini-dialogues making (1) formal and (2) informal requests, and replying to them. For example:

‘I’m sorry to trouble you, but do you know where I can get a coffee?’ ‘Yes; there’s a good place just along there on the right.’
‘You couldn’t lend me a pen, could you?’ ‘Sure, here you are.’

Pages 290–291

Possible further activities

Scripting dialogues  Get students, in groups of three or four, to prepare, practise and perform dialogues containing examples of several of the politeness structures practised here. They will need quite some time to do this. Suggest possible situations if necessary.

Page 293

Possible further activities

Improving a paragraph  Get the class to rewrite the paragraph beginning ‘In this report …’. 

→ Section 17 continues
possible further activities

To-do lists  Get students to write real or imaginary to-do lists (for themselves, for a celebrity, for a Roman Emperor …).

possible further activities

Headlines  Get students to find news headlines with the different grammatical characteristics discussed on this page.