

Unit 118 Focusing: **it-clauses** and **what-clauses**

**A** Focusing with **it-clauses**

We can use an *it*-clause to focus attention on certain information. Compare:

- 'Helen bought the car from Tom.' 'No, it was Tom that bought the car from Helen.'
- 'Helen bought her car last year.' 'No, it was two years ago that Helen bought the car.'
- 'Helen bought her car from Bob.' 'No, it was Tom that Helen bought the car from.'

The information we want to emphasise comes after **be** and is followed by a clause usually beginning with **that**. We sometimes use **which** or **who** instead of **that**; **when** and **where** can also be used, but usually only in informal English; and **how** or **why** can't replace **that**:

- His parents were always there to help; it was to them that/who he now turned for support.
- 'Sue's just arrived.' 'That's odd. It's usually on Thursday that/when she visits.'
- 'Was it by cutting staff that he managed to save the firm?' 'No, it was by improving distribution that he succeeded.' (*not* ...how he succeeded.)

**B** Focusing with **what-clauses**

Compare the following sentences:

- We gave them some home-made ice cream. *and*
- What we gave them *was* some home-made ice cream.

If we want to focus particular attention on certain information in a sentence, we sometimes use a *what*-clause followed by **be**. The information we want to focus attention on is outside the *what*-clause. We often do this if we want to introduce a new topic; to give a reason, instruction or explanation; or to correct something that has been said or done. In the following examples, the information in focus is underlined:

- What I'd like you to work on is exercise two on page 38.
- Tim arrived two hours late: what had happened was that his bicycle chain had broken.
- 'We've only got this small bookcase – will that do?' 'No, what I was looking for was something much bigger and stronger.'

We can often put the *what*-clause either at the beginning or the end of the sentence:

- What upset me most *was* his rudeness.    *or*    • His rudeness *was* what upset me most.

To emphasise an *action* performed by someone, we use a sentence with **what...do...**:

- Dave lost his job and was short of money, so what he did was (to) sell his flat and move in with his brother.
- A: When the bookcase arrived, two shelves were broken.  
B: Did you send it back?  
A: No, what we did was (to) send them a letter of complaint.

The pattern in this kind of sentence is **what + subject + do + be + to-infinitive** clause. (Notice that the 'to' in the infinitive can be omitted.)

**C** We rarely use other *wh*-clauses (beginning **how**, **when**, **where**, **who**, **why**) in the same way. Instead, we prefer phrases instead of the *wh*-word. Here are some examples:

- The only reason (**why/that**) I left the party early was that I was feeling unwell. (*rather than* Why I left the party early was...)
- The place (**where/that**) you should play football is the playground, not the classroom. (*rather than* Where you should play football is...)
- The best way (**in which/that**) you can open the bottle is by putting it in hot water first. (*rather than* How you can open the bottle is...)
- Somebody (**who/that**) I enjoy reading is Peter Carey. (*not* Who I enjoy reading is...)
- The time (**when/that**) I work best is early morning. (*rather than* When I work best is...)

## EXERCISES

**118.1** Rewrite the sentences to focus attention on the underlined information. Start with **it + be** and an appropriate **wh-** word or **that**. (C)

- 1 I'm not looking forward to physics, but I'm most worried about the statistics exam.  
I'm not looking forward to physics, but...it's the statistics exam (*that/which*) I'm most worried about.
- 2 She's been seeing a doctor at Newtown Hospital, but she's having the operation in the Queen Mary Hospital.  
She's been seeing a doctor at Newtown Hospital, but...
- 3 They said they dropped in when they were passing, but I think they came to visit us because they wanted to watch TV.  
They said they dropped in when they were passing, but I think...
- 4 He says he's got a cold, but in fact he's feeling unwell because he's working so hard.  
He says he's got a cold, but in fact...

**118.2** Give responses beginning **No, what...**, correcting what was said in the question. The first one is done for you. Use the notes in brackets to help. (B)

- 1 'Did you say that you wanted me to move these boxes?' (wanted you / fill boxes / these books)  
'No, what I said was that I wanted you to fill the boxes with these books.'
- 2 'Did you mean that you will give me the money?' (lend / money until next week)
- 3 'Did you think that I would take Mark to piano practice?' (going / his own)

Now give similar responses which focus on the action, as in 4:

- 4 'Did you go next door and complain about the noise?' (call / police)  
'No, what I did was (to) call the police.'
- 5 'Did you buy a new washing machine?' (repair / old one)
- 6 'Did you write a letter to the company?' (phone / managing director directly)
- 7 'Did you stay with Keith for the New Year?' (invite him / my house instead)

**118.3** Write a sentence using one of these phrases in C opposite and the information in brackets. You need to put the information in the right order and add an appropriate form of **be**. (C)

- 1 'When do you think you were happiest?' (university)  
'I suppose...the place (*where/that*) I was happiest was at university.'
- 2 'Bromley is where Nick lives, isn't it?' (Broomfield)  
'No, not exactly...'
- 3 'You enjoy gardening, don't you?' (we wanted a bigger garden – we moved house)  
'Yes, in fact...'
- 4 'I'm looking for a photographer for our wedding.' (David Diskin – takes excellent photographs)  
'If you ask me...'

Unit 119 Inversion (1)

**A** In statements it is usual for the verb to follow the subject. Sometimes, however, this word order is reversed. We can refer to this as **INVERSION**. Compare:

- *Her father stood* in the doorway. → In the doorway *stood her father*.
- *He had rarely seen* such a sunset. → Rarely *had he* seen such a sunset.
- He showed me his ID card. I only *let him* in then. → Only then *did I* let him in.

Notice how the subject comes after the verb (e.g. *stood*) or an auxiliary (e.g. *had, did*). Units 119 and 120 study the circumstances in which inversion takes place. Some of these are also looked at in earlier units and brought together here.

**B** **Inversion after adverbial phrases of direction and place**  
When we put an adverbial phrase, especially of direction or place, at the beginning of a sentence, we sometimes put an intransitive verb in front of its subject. This kind of inversion is found particularly in formal or literary styles:

- Dave began to open the three parcels. *Inside the first was a book of crosswords* from his Aunt Alice. (*or, less formally* Inside the first there was a book of crosswords...)

With the verb *be* we always use inversion in sentences like this, and inversion is usual with certain verbs of place and movement, such as *climb, come, fly, go, hang, lie, run, sit, stand*:

- Above the fireplace *was a portrait of the Duke*. (*not ...a portrait of the Duke was*.)
- In an armchair *sat his mother*. (*rather than ...his mother sat*.)

Inversion doesn't usually occur with other verbs. We don't invert subject and verb when the subject is a pronoun. So, for example, we don't say 'In an armchair sat she.'

**C** In speech, inversion often occurs after *here* and *there*, and adverbs such as *back, down, in, off, up, round, etc.*:

- *Here comes* Sandra's car. • I lit the fuse and after a few seconds *up went* the rocket.

**D** **Inversion in conditional sentences**  
We can use clauses with inversion instead of certain kinds of *if*-clauses. (See Unit 100.) Compare:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It would be a serious setback, <i>if the talks</i> were to fail.</li> <li>• <i>If you should need</i> more information, please telephone our main office.</li> <li>• <i>If Alex had asked</i>, I would have been able to help.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It would be a serious setback, <i>were the talks</i> to fail.</li> <li>• <i>Should you need</i> more information, please telephone our main office.</li> <li>• <i>Had Alex asked</i>, I would have been able to help.</li> </ul>
--	---

The sentences with inversion are rather more formal than those with 'if'. Notice that in negative clauses with inversion, we don't use contracted forms:

- *Had he not resigned*, we would have been forced to sack him. (*not* *Hadn't he...*)

**E** **Inversion in comparisons with 'as' and 'than'**

- The cake was excellent, *as was* the coffee. (*or ...as* the coffee was.)
- I believed, *as did* my colleagues, that the plan would work. (*or ...as* my colleagues did...)
- Research shows that children living in villages watch more television *than do* their counterparts in inner city areas. (*or ...than* their counterparts do...)

We prefer to use inversion after *as* and *than* in formal written language. Notice that we don't invert subject and verb when the subject is a pronoun.

EXERCISES

**119.1** Rewrite these sentences with the adverbial phrase(s) of direction or place at the front of the clause. Use inversion where possible. (B & C)

- 1 The people dived for cover as the bullets flew over their heads. ...*as over their heads flew the bullets*.
- 2 That night, just as John had predicted, a heavy snowfall came down.
- 3 The two men were talking in front of the station.
- 4 A line of police officers was behind the protesters.
- 5 A small stream ran at the end of the street. There was an overgrown garden across the stream.
- 6 She could hear the sound of the tractor and suddenly it came round the corner.
- 7 A white pillar was in front of them and a small, marble statue stood on top of it.
- 8 The teacher blew a whistle and the children ran off.

**119.2** Match the most likely sentence halves and then make new sentences beginning *Were..., Should..., or Had...* (D)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 If the government were forced into another election,...        | a you will be expected to start work on 1st April. |
| 2 If you should wish to make an appointment to see Dr Simons,... | b a large area of the sea would be contaminated.   |
| 3 If she had become a lawyer, as her parents wished,...          | c I would have been held responsible.              |
| 4 If the chemicals were to leak,...                              | d <del>it would be the favourite to win.</del>     |
| 5 If you should have further problems with your printer,...      | e she would have earned a large salary.            |
| 6 If Germany were to beat Romania,...                            | f she is available between 9.00 and 11.00.         |
| 7 If anything had gone wrong with my plan,...                    | g contact your dealer for advice.                  |
| 8 If you should decide to accept the post,...                    | h they would face Italy in the final.              |

Example: 1 + (d) *Were the government to be forced into another election, it would be the favourite to win.*

**119.3** Write new sentences from these situations using *as* or *than* + *be* or *do*. (E)

- 1 She loved staying in the cottage. Her friends who visited her there loved it, too. *She loved staying in the cottage, as did her friends who visited her there.*
- 2 Compared to France, Germany has more company-cars on its roads. *Germany...*
- 3 The European Union is in economic difficulties, together with the USA and Japan. *The European Union...*
- 4 Compared with ten years ago we now know a lot more about the Universe. *We now know...*
- 5 My sister knows something about computers, but I know a lot more. *I...*
- 6 After forty years the hotel is still there. The man who first ran it is there, too. *After forty years,...*

## Unit 120 Inversion (2)

### A Inversion after negative adverbials

In formal and literary language in particular, we use negative adverbials at the beginning of a clause. The subject and verb are inverted:

- after the time adverbials **never** (before), **rarely**, **seldom**; **barely/hardly/scarcely...when/before**; **no sooner...than**:
  - **Seldom do we have** goods returned to us because they are faulty. (*not Seldom we do...*)
  - **Hardly had I got** onto the motorway when I saw two police cars following me.
- after **only + a time expression**, as in **only after**, **only later**, **only once**, **only then**, **only when**:
  - She bought a newspaper and some sweets at the shop on the corner. **Only later did she realise** that she'd been given the wrong change.
  - **Only once did I go** to the opera in the whole time I was in Italy.
- after **only + other prepositional phrases** beginning **only by...**, **only in...**, **only with...**, etc.:
  - **Only by chance had Jameson discovered** where the birds were nesting.
  - Mary had to work at evenings and weekends. **Only in this way was she able** to complete the report by the deadline.
- after expressions with **preposition + no**, such as **at no time**, **in no way**, **on no account**, **under/in no circumstances**:
  - **At no time did they actually break** the rules of the game.
  - **Under no circumstances are passengers permitted** to open the doors themselves.
- after expressions with **not...**, such as **not only**, **not until**, and also **not + object**:
  - **Not until August did the government order** an inquiry into the accident.
  - **Not a single word had she written** since the exam had started.
- after little with a negative meaning:
  - **Little do they know** how lucky they are to live in such a wonderful house.
  - **Little did I then realise** the day would come when Michael would be famous.

Notice that inversion can occur after a *clause* beginning **only after/if/when** or **not until**:

- **Only when the famine gets worse will world governments begin** to act.
- **Not until the train pulled into Euston Station did Jim find** that his coat had gone.

### B Inversion after 'so + adjective... that'; 'such + be...that'; 'neither.../nor...'

Compare these pairs of sentences:

- Her business was so successful that Marie was able to retire at the age of 50. *or*
- **So successful was her business**, that Marie was able to retire at the age of 50.
- The weather conditions became so dangerous that all mountain roads were closed. *or*
- **So dangerous did weather conditions become**, that all mountain roads were closed.

- We can use **so + adjective** at the beginning of a clause to give special emphasis to the adjective.
- When we do this, the subject and verb are inverted.

We can use **such + be** at the beginning of a clause to emphasise the extent or degree of something. The subject and verb are inverted. Compare:

- **Such is the popularity** of the play that the theatre is likely to be full every night. *or*
- The play is so popular that the theatre is likely to be full every night.

We invert the subject and verb after **neither** and **nor** when these words begin a clause:

- For some time after the explosion Jack couldn't hear, and **neither could he see**.
- The council never wanted the new supermarket to be built, **nor did local residents**.

## EXERCISES

120.1 Write new sentences with a similar meaning beginning with one of these adverbials. (A)

never before    not    not until    ~~only by~~    on no account    scarcely

- 1 The door could not be opened without using force. **Only by (using) force could the door be opened.**
- 2 This was the first time the race had been won by a European athlete.
- 3 The plane had only just taken off when smoke started to appear in the cabin.
- 4 She made no sound as she crept upstairs.
- 5 This window must not be unlocked without prior permission.
- 6 He only thought about having a holiday abroad after he retired.

Now do the same using these adverbials. (A)

barely    in no way    little    no sooner    only after    seldom

- 7 The telephone started ringing just after he had left the office.
- 8 It is unusual for the interior of the island to be visited by tourists.
- 9 Judith started asking me questions as soon as I had stepped through the door.
- 10 They didn't get round to business until they had finished eating.
- 11 The existence of extraterrestrial life is not confirmed by the report.
- 12 She didn't realise what would happen to her next.

120.2 Complete these sentences in any appropriate way. (B)

- 1 Such was the power of the punch that his opponent fell to the canvas.
- 2 Such ..... that half the trees in the area were blown down.
- 3 Such ..... that shops all over the country have sold out.
- 4 So ....., that no-one believed him.
- 5 So ....., that he felt he didn't need to revise any more.
- 6 So ....., that the United Nations sent food and water supplies to the area.

120.3 Correct any mistakes you find in this newspaper item. (Units 119 & 120)

## TOWN EVACUATED AS FOREST FIRES APPROACH

The people of Sawston were evacuated yesterday as forest fires headed towards the town. Such the heat was of the oncoming inferno that trees more than 100 metres ahead began to smoulder. Only once in recent years, during 1994, a town of this size has had to be evacuated because of forest fires. A fleet of coaches and lorries arrived in the town in the early morning. Into these vehicles the sick and elderly climbed, before they headed off to safety across the river. Residents with cars were ordered to leave by mid morning.

Later in the day, as the wind changed direction and it became clear that the fire would leave Sawston untouched, were heard complaints from some residents. "At no time the fires posed a real threat," said one local man. "I didn't want to leave my home, and nor most of my neighbours did." But Chief Fire Officer Jones replied, "Hadn't we taken this action, lives would have been put at risk. Only when the fires have moved well away from the town residents will be allowed to return to their homes."