Getting Things in Order: Practice with word order

Directions for the teacher:

STEP 1 – Do Task A as a class. Conclude that sometimes variation in word order is acceptable, but other times word order changes the meaning.

Answers:

a) I once heard someone play an ancient Chinese instrument.

b) Once I heard someone play an ancient Chinese instrument. = These sentences have the same meaning.

c) Once the teacher did not give us homework. = This happened one time, but usually the teacher gives homework.

d) Not once did the teacher give us homework. = The teacher never gave homework.

STEP 2 – Have students work independently or in pairs on Task B. Correct their work as a class. Have volunteers read their sentences aloud.

See the last two pages of this handout for a set of guidelines. You can choose to present these guidelines before or after this task. Do you wish to test their current knowledge and then explain standard word order? Or do you wish to share the guidelines and have students apply them to the task? The order of the sentences follow the order of the guidelines. Answers:

1. How much experience do you with this kind of situation?

2. He trusted her completely. Little did he know that she was lying.

3. We discussed our sales strategy at the meeting.

4. I ordered a new printer for my office.

5. Although we always look out for new talent, we rarely encounter a candidate with this kind of skills set.

6. We should always be willing to hear others’ views.

7. What happened here yesterday was shocking.


9. Her delicate hands caught the eye of the artist, and he began to sketch them.

10. The eager child showed his grandfather his new toys, photos, and baseball card collection.

11. Jessica worked quickly to meet the new deadline.

12. How can he afford those fancy black Italian loafers?
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A. Are the sentence pairs the same in meaning? Explain.
   a) I once heard someone play an ancient Chinese instrument.
   b) Once I heard someone play an ancient Chinese instrument.
   c) Once the teacher did not give us homework.
   d) Not once did the teacher give us homework.

B. Improve the word order of each sentence.

1. How much experience you have with this kind of situation?
2. He trusted her completely. Little he did know that she was lying.
3. We discussed at the meeting our sales strategy.
4. I ordered for my office a new printer.
5. Although we look out always for new talent, we encounter rarely a candidate with this kind of skills set.
6. We should be willing always to hear others’ views.
7. What happened yesterday here was shocking.
9. Her hands delicate caught the eye of the artist, and he began to sketch them.
10. The eager child showed his new toys, photos, and baseball card collection to his grandfather.
11. Jessica worked to meet the new deadline quickly.
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Word order guidelines:

1. A sentence must have a subject and a verb. The subject comes before the verb.
   - Tomas has traveled.
   - You are beautiful

2. Use inversion (verb-subject word order) in
   - questions
     - Does she sing?
     - Are you busy?
   - statements that begin with a negative adverb to restrict the meaning
     - Seldom does he complain.
     - Never have they offered to make repairs.
   - adverbs of agreement: so, neither
     - I love to travel. – So do I.
     - I can’t speak French. – Neither can I.
   - initial words or phrases that refer to existence, position, or direction
     - Here is the answer. (A noun phrase must follow the verb.)
     - In the middle of the woods stood a tiny cottage.

3. Don’t separate a verb from its object.
   - She sang a folk song at the concert.
   - You speak Spanish very well.

4. Place an indirect object with its preposition after the direct object. Otherwise, it comes before the direct object.
   - He gave a dozen roses to her.
   - He gave her a dozen roses.

5. Adverbs of frequency go after the verb BE and before all other verbs.
   - I am always late for yoga class.
   - I always arrive late for yoga class.

6. Adverbs of frequency separate a helping verb from the main verb.
   - I’ve never seen anything like it.
   - We will always remember your contributions.
   - Have you always lived here?

7. Place usually comes before time.
   - I’ll meet you here in an hour.
   - Let’s go to the movies this weekend.
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8. Newer information usually follows older information.
   Matt met someone last month. She works in the same company. The two of them have a lot in common.

9. Adjectives come before the head noun.
   I saw a blue fish.

10. After the S-V-O, longer structures generally go after shorter ones.
    I saw a blue fish with red stripes and two long whiskers or “feelers” in front.

11. Keep closely related structures together.
    I saw a blue fish with red stripes swimming in the water.

    I saw a beautiful blue fish.
    They have cute little freshwater fish.