

Academic Writing

Lesson 1
Syntactic Structures Revisited

Part 1

Noun phrases

Noun phrases

- ◉ Academic English puts a lot of information into noun phrases rather than spreading it out over a sentence
- ◉ This means
 - You need to know how to nominalise verbs
 - You need to be able to construct compound nouns
 - You need to know the difference between a noun and an adjective in compounds (more tricky than it sounds)
 - You need to be able to put the adjectives and compound elements in the right sequential order.

Nominalising verbs

- ◉ Some verbs are derived from nouns so you revert to the original noun form
- ◉ Other verbs are not derived from nouns.
 - The most common way to nominalise these is to add *-ation* or *-ition* to the infinitive, but it is not the only way...
 - Sometimes there is no change at all!
 - Sometimes you use a present participle
 - Sometimes you add *-ment*
 - or *-ance/ -ence*
 - or something else entirely

Compound nouns

- ◉ Compound nouns look like adjective-noun combinations, with the difference that there are no adjectives present...
- ◉ This means
 - Only the **head noun** can be plural
 - The compound elements are invariable (singular)
 - The nouns in the sequence are never separated with commas or "and"

Compound nouns

- ◉ What's the difference between an adjective and a noun in a compound?
 - Adjectives describe *characteristics* and *qualities*, and can be subjective or objective
 - Nouns describe *functions*, and are objective
- ◉ Where do they come in the sequence?
 - Subjective adjectives come first
 - Then come the objective adjectives
 - Compound elements come last, and are therefore nearest to the head noun

Compound nouns

TASK 1

- ◉ A - Look at the list of noun phrases
 - Say whether they are compound nouns or noun+adjective(s)
- ◉ B - Expand ("unpack") the noun phrases
- ◉ C - Condense (if you can) the examples which use the structure "the x of y"

Adjectives

- ◉ When more than one adjective is used in a noun phrase, the sequencing is fairly fixed
 - Nothing is ever completely fixed
 - You can change the "standard" sequence, but the meaning will change slightly
 - If you bring an adjective nearer to the start of the sequence, it becomes emphatic
 - If you move an adjective closer to the noun, it can be perceived as an "afterthought"

Adjectives

- ◉ First come subjective observations
 - E.g. atrocious, extortionate, stunning,
- ◉ Then physical descriptions
 - size → shape → age → [colour & pattern]
- ◉ Then origin
- ◉ Then material
- ◉ Then compound elements
- ◉ Then (phew!) the head noun

Adjectives

- ◉ If you want to describe an adjective (well, you never know), use an adverb
 - highly toxic; deeply felt; widely considered
- ◉ If the adverb describes only one of the adjectives, you must connect it with a hyphen
 - highly-toxic dangerous substances
 - deeply-felt emotional ties
- ◉ In any case, it is common to hyphenate an adverb and adjective before a noun

Adjectives

◉ TASK 3

- Put the adjectives and adverbs into the correct order. Use hyphens when necessary

Noun phrases

◉ TASK 3

- Reduce the verbiage (=cut the c**p)
 - Identify the main (independent) clause in the following sentences.
 - Identify, for each one, the Subject, the Verb, and the obligatory complement or object(s)
 - Remember that some passives are agentless, so you can't say who carried out the action

Noun phrases

● TASK 4

- Expand the sentences, especially the noun phrases, using anything that you consider syntactically possible, including:
 - Compound nouns
 - Adjective sequences
 - Relative clauses
 - Nominalised verbs
 - Adverbial phrases for manner, time, place

Part 2

Verb phrases

English syntax for beginners

- Every sentence needs a SUBJECT and a VERB
- Intransitive verbs need nothing else
 - Many intransitive verbs can also be used transitively: there may be a change in meaning when this happens
e.g. *I eat three times a day* (intransitive)
I don't eat fish (transitive)
 - Some verbs are transitive, but can be used ergatively: ergative verbs look like intransitive verbs
 - the direct object of the transitive verb becomes the subject.
e.g. *he opened the door* (transitive)
the door opened (ergative)
the door was opened (by sb.) (passive transitive)
 - Ergative verbs in academic writing tend to refer to change

English syntax for beginners

- Some verbs need a COMPLEMENT or a DIRECT OBJECT
 - A complement is an adjective or adverb
 - A direct object is a noun
 - Verbs cannot take other verbs as a complement
 - When the direct object is an action, the noun corresponds to the present participle of the relevant verb.
- Link verbs (copulas) take a complement.
e.g. *This paper is concerned with the historiography of...*
This theory has become very popular in recent years
- Transitive verbs take a direct object
e.g. *The team conducted a range of experiments to...*
In this section I discuss the relationship between X and Y

English syntax for beginners

- Ditransitive verbs need two objects: a DIRECT OBJECT and an INDIRECT OBJECT
e.g. *Jones et al (1992b) give us comprehensive proof that...*
The main points are explained to us in Allen (ibid.)
- Some verbs have other, obligatory, "arguments" (e.g. manner, place, time)
 - Go (and other verbs of movement) require a location
 - The verbs amble, stumble, shuffle require a manner
 - Verbs in the past simple, and verbs expressing beginnings and endings, typically require a time.
- All verbs can potentially have other arguments

Verbs in academic writing

- The verbs that you will use most often in academic writing are copulas (link verbs), reporting verbs, and delexical (light) verbs

Verbs in academic writing

- ◎ Copulas express
 - Sameness (and reversibility): $X = Y \rightarrow Y = X$
= *be, equal, look, sound, feel, seem, appear...*
 - Processes of change: X becomes, gets Y
- ◎ Copulas tend to occur in simple syntax (SVC)
- ◎ Copulas tend to involve complex noun phrases
 - These may include complex relative and subordinate relations, including (multiple) embedded relative clauses

Copulas in context

- ◎ TASK 5
 - Read the extract and locate the verbs (most are copulas)
 - How complex are the verb structures?
 - How complex are the noun phrases?

Verbs in academic writing

- ◎ Reporting verbs express
 - Thought processes (*believe, know, think, be aware, suspect, expect, anticipate...*)
 - Verbal processes (*say, claim, deny, suggest, report...*)
 - Writing processes (*write, note, record...*)
- ◎ Reporting verbs introduce that-clauses
 - The *that* of a that-clause is never obligatory
 - Other relative pronouns may take the place of *that* (e.g. *how, what, where*). If so, they are obligatory.

Reporting

- ◎ TASK 6
 - Read the extract and locate the reporting verbs, especially those followed by a *that*-clause.
 - What tense is the reporting verb?
 - What tense is its dependent clause?
 - How complex is the reporting clause?
 - How complex is the reported clause?

Tenses and meanings

- ◎ Make sure you know which present tense to use, and when
 - Present simple expresses permanence and normality
 - It is used for universal truths and for habits.
 - It is also used for describing typical characteristics
 - Present progressive expresses transience and atypicality
 - It is used to report the current instance
 - It is used to highlight uncharacteristic features or behaviour
 - It is not used with state verbs, except in emphatic form
 - Present perfect expresses continued relevance
 - It is used to discuss past facts (e.g. academic reports, books & papers) which are still considered current (relevant)
 - It is used to report present effects of (recent) past action

Tenses and meanings

- ◎ Make sure you know which past tense to use, and when
 - Past simple expresses past facts
 - When discussing the literature, it may express "no longer relevant", especially if contrasted with present tenses.
 - Past progressive expresses (repeated) procedures
 - It is used to report particular data collection/ experiment
 - It is used to highlight uncharacteristic features or behaviour
 - It is not used with state verbs, except in emphatic form
 - Past perfect expresses "was true, but refuted in the past"
 - It is used to discuss past beliefs and tenets
 - It is used to discuss paradigm shifts and progress

Tenses and meanings

- ◉ Tenses are not necessarily objective
 - You can transmit meaning through the tense you choose to use
 - e.g. *This is discussed* [+where + when]
 - This is being discussed* [+where + when]
 - This has been discussed* [+where + when]
 - This was being discussed* [+where + when]
 - This was discussed* [+where + when]
 - This had been discussed* [+where + when]

Tenses and meanings

- e.g. *As Smith (1985) argues, ...*
As Smith has argued (1985a, 1986, 1988b), ...
As Smith has been arguing (1985a, 1986, 1988b), ...
As Smith (1985) argued, ...
As Smith was arguing in the 1980s, ...
As Smith (1985) had argued, ...
As Smith had been arguing (1985a, 1986, 1988b), ...

Tenses and meanings

- ◉ For futures and modals, the same applies, but in a more transparent way (see unit 10)
- ◉ TASK 7 Verb tenses
 - Read the extract from the article *Interdependent Urbanization in an Urban World: An Historical Overview*
 - Put the verbs into an appropriate tense. Sometimes more than one is possible: the original is provided as a guide

Lesson 1 - homework

- ◉ You have been given two lists of verbs to nominalise.
 - Fill in the ones you (think you) know
 - Have a stab at the ones you don't know
 - Check your answers in a dictionary
- ◉ What verb(s) habitually occur with the nouns (Verb-Noun collocate worksheet)?
 - Complete the table, using a dictionary to help.
 - It's boring, but necessary ☺

Delexical verbs and collocation

- ◉ What verb(s) habitually occur with the nouns on the Verb-Noun collocate worksheet?
 - Work in small groups and, using a dictionary to help, complete the table
 - It's boring, but necessary ☺