SECTION I

Fronting

1 WHAT IS FRONTING?

Fronting involves moving an object, verb or adverbial phrase to a position before the subject:

Usual	Fronted
The door opened and Daphne ***came in.***	*The door opened and* ***in came*** *Daphne.*
I don't know ***what we're going to do.***	***What we're going to do*** *I don't know.*
His second book was ***particularly good.***	***Particularly good*** *was his second book.*
The swimmers dived ***into the water.***	***Into the water*** *dived the swimmers.*
I waited ***all week*** *for your phone call.*	***All week*** *I waited for your phone call.*
They walked ***slowly*** *into the garden.*	***Slowly,*** *they walked into the garden.*
I've ***never*** *seen anything so awful.*	***Never*** *have I seen anything so awful.*

(For inversion after negative adverbs, see Unit 7, Section 2.)

watch out!

It's unusual to end a sentence with *be* as a result of fronting. Therefore we invert the subject and verb:

✘ ~~*Lying in the field three men were.*~~

✓ *Lying in the field* ***were*** *three men.*

- When we front a prepositional phrase of place or movement, we normally invert the subject and verb. This is not usual with other prepositional phrases:

  ✘ ~~*At seven o'clock arrived the removal van.*~~

  ✓ *Out of the water jumped the penguins.*

2 WHY DO WE USE FRONTING?

There are two main reasons for using fronting:

- In English the beginning of a sentence contains the topic; new information normally comes at the end (see Unit 2, Overview). Fronting changes the order and so changes the emphasis:
  I stopped work ***at four o'clock.*** (= the time is the most important information)
  At four o'clock *I stopped work.* (= stopping work is the most important information)
- We may move information to the beginning of the sentence to provide a clear link with what comes before:
  He planned to complete the painting in time for the opening ceremony. ***This*** *he did, but only just.*
  They looked out to sea. ***On the horizon*** *he could see a number of ships.*

3 FRONTING NOUN CLAUSES

We can front noun clauses in fairly formal English (see Unit 10):

Where he went *I have no idea.*
That he ran a marathon at his age *is unbelievable.*
To read all Shakespeare's plays *is my ambition.*

- More commonly we use a *to*-infinitive or *that*-clauses after *It* (see Section 2):
  It *is unbelievable* ***that he ran a marathon at his age.***
  It *is my great ambition* ***to read all Shakespeare's plays.***

4 USING INTRODUCTION PHRASES

We often use introduction phrases, especially in spoken English, to signal that what we're about to say is important:

The thing is, *I haven't got any money.*
The fact remains *that we've made a mistake.*
The point is *we should be there by now.*

- We can also use phrases with the same pattern (*The* + noun + *be*) to focus on the point of what we are saying or writing. Here are examples:
  The question is *– are we ready for the radical changes being proposed?*
  The truth is *I'm just too tired to concentrate properly.*
  The problem is *she just refuses to work with me.*
  The trouble is *her attitude upsets just about everyone.*

? check

Tick (✓) the sentences that include examples of fronting.

a Up in the air went the balloon.
b Early the following morning we all got into the car.
c That people should get angry nobody ever anticipated.
d I rushed out of the room, grabbing my glasses from the table.
e What happened next we shall find out next week.

SECTION 2

Introductory There and It

1 *THERE* AS SUBJECT

We use *There* + *be* to introduce new information. The word *there* has no real meaning in this structure – it functions as a grammatical subject:

***There were** two men in the room.* (= Two men were in the room.)
*Suddenly, **there was** a loud explosion.*
***There are** sure to be casualties.*

2 INTRODUCTORY *IT*

It often refers back to a noun or noun phrase:

*Next year's sales plan is now available; **it** contains a few changes.*

- However, sometimes *It* doesn't refer back to a noun. Instead we use it simply as a grammatical subject:

***It's** very dark in here.*
***It** was just unbelievable what they'd done.*

- We use introductory *It* especially when describing things, e.g. with adjectives that can't normally function as subjects. We commonly use *It* to talk about the weather and the time:

***It's** raining.*
***It's** nearly six o'clock.*
***It** smells of fish in there.*

watch out!

All English sentences must have a subject. When there is no obvious subject for the sentence, we generally use *There* before nouns or noun phrases and *It* before adjectives and noun clauses:

✗ ~~*Is cold, isn't it?*~~
✓ *It's cold, isn't it?*

3 *IT* + CLAUSE

Introductory *It* is often followed by a *to*-infinitive, *-ing*, or *that*-clause. We do this especially if we want to emphasise the adjective or avoid fronting a noun clause (see Unit 10, Section 1):

*It's difficult **to understand** a word he said.*
*It's fun **working** with you.*
*It turned out **that** he was lying to us all along.*

4 REFERRING FORWARD

Sometimes *It* refers forward to a noun clause in the sentence:

*It's amazing **what you learn from hanging around bars.***
*It frightens me **that there are so many criminals around.***

- We use *It* especially with *that*-clauses, *wh*-clauses and *to*-infinitive clauses that may be formal in subject position. The sentences above could be rewritten:

What you learn from hanging around bars is amazing.
That there are so many criminals around frightens me.

5 *IT* + REPORT VERB

Introductory *It* is common with report verbs used in the passive (see Unit 2, Section 2.3):

***It is thought** that many people have been injured.*

- The structure with *It* + *seem / appear* + *that* is common in reporting events. We also use *It would seem / appear that*:

***It appears that** he's been promoted.*
***It would seem that** someone left the door unlocked.*

6 VERBS FOLLOWED BY *IT*

Some verbs are commonly followed by *it* + clause:

*I **find it** strange that they haven't told us.*

- Here are more examples of verbs we use in this way:

believe** **consider** **feel** **imagine** **think** **suppose** **judge** **count** **reckon** **guess

? check

Write F next to the sentences where *it* refers forward to a clause, B next to those where *it* refers back, and ✗ next to those where *it* doesn't refer to anything in the sentence.

a It's getting crowded now.
b It is astonishing how often I've been asked that question.
c I bought a new car and it broke down almost immediately.
d What time is it?
e Is it true that she's run away?

SECTION 3

Emphasis using What, All *and* It

1 EMPHASISING AN ACTION WITH *WHAT*

To emphasise an action, we can use a structure with *What* + *do*. (The full structure is *What* + subject + *do* + *be* + infinitive with or without *to*.):

Usual	What...
He put the pot on the table.	***What he did was (to) put** the pot on the table.*
I'm going to persuade him to come earlier.	***What I'm going to do is persuade** him to come earlier.*

- We commonly use this structure when demonstrating a procedure or telling someone about a sequence of events:
  ***What you do next is fold** the top left corner back on itself.*

2 OTHER WAYS OF USING *WH*-CLAUSES

We can emphasise a whole action or series of actions with a similar structure using *What* + *happen* + *be* + *that*-clause:

***What happened** next **was (that)** he dropped it.*
***What happened was (that)** they all ran away as soon as they saw the police car coming.*

- We can also use fronted *wh*-clauses with *be* as a sort of introductory phrase:
  ***What I think is (that)** she should resign.*
  ***What you need is** a holiday.*
  ***What Clive is** is a pain in the neck.*
- Occasionally, the *what*-clause comes at the end of the sentence:
  *A good rest is **what I need.***
  *Your lateness is **what I want to talk about.***

3 USING *ALL* INSTEAD OF *WHAT*

We can use *all* instead of *what* to mean 'the only thing'. This suggests that what happens is not very big or important:

***All we are going to do is** take your teeth out.*
***All that happened was that** a window was broken.*

4 EMPHASISING NOUNS WITH *IT* + *BE* + *THAT/WHO*

To emphasise nouns, we can use a structure with *It* + *be* + *that* / *who*. These structures are sometimes called 'cleft sentences':

Usual	Cleft sentence
She threw the jug out of the window.	***It was the jug (that)** she threw out of the window.* (= not, for example, the cup)
	or: ***It was the window (that)** she threw the jug out of.* (= not, for example, the door)
Richard ran into the office.	***It was Richard who** ran into the office.* (= not Bernard)
	or: ***It was the office (that)** Richard ran into.* (= not the kitchen)

- Cleft sentences allow us to stress a noun, often in contrast to what we have already said:
  *I love going to Cornwall in summer, but **it's in the winter that** it's at its best.*

5 EMPHASISING OTHER PARTS OF THE SENTENCE

We can also use a cleft sentence to focus on other parts of the sentence, not just nouns. We can use it:

- to emphasise an action by using a gerund:
  ***It was learning to speak French that** he found most enjoyable at school.* (not, for example, playing football)
- to emphasise a prepositional phrase:
  ***It was from Heather that** I heard the news.*
  ***It was in London that** he met his first wife.*
- with *because* to give reasons:
  ***It was because you're clever that** I married you.*
- with *when* or *until* to emphasise time:
  ***It was only when he phoned that** I realised what had happened.*
  ***It wasn't until Tuesday that** they finally delivered the equipment.*

? check

Write W next to the sentences that contain a *what*-clause or *all*-clause, C next to those that contain a cleft sentence, and ✗ next to any that contain neither.

a What we did was to go back to the beginning and start again.
b Your progress is all I'm concerned with.
c He promised to call me but it wasn't until later that week that he eventually phoned.
d It is unbelievable the lengths I had to go to in securing the contract.
e I think it's because we have the same sense of humour that we work so well together.

SECTION 4

Nominalisation

1 WHAT IS NOMINALISATION?

It is often possible to use a noun group instead of one or more verb or adjective groups. This is called 'nominalisation':

The boys laughed loudly and *woke up the baby.* (= This sentence consists of two actions (verb groups), one causing the other)
The boys' loud laughter *woke up the baby.*
(= This sentence has one thing – the boys' loud laughter (a noun group) – that causes an action)

2 WHY USE NOMINALISATION?

We use nominalisation for several reasons:

- It can change the emphasis of the sentence. Compare:
  I wasn't very well so I had to stay at home.
  My poor health *meant I had to stay at home.*
  (= nominalised)
  The first sentence has two parts linked by *so*. Both parts are equally important. In the nominalised version, the action – *stay at home* – is the focus of the sentence.
- Because a lot of information can be packed into a noun group, it can make sentences shorter and leave the rest of the sentence free to add new information:

Usual	Nominalised version
He had an insatiable appetite for adventure and because of this he became involved in a pioneering expedition to Antarctica.	***His insatiable appetite for adventure*** *led to* ***his involvement*** *in a pioneering expedition to Antarctica.*

- It can refer back to processes already mentioned:
  After several days they eventually reached the summit of the mountain. ***The ascent*** *left them tired and exhausted.* (= Here the ascent summarises the whole of the process in the previous sentence)
- We often prefer to start a sentence with a noun phrase rather than a verb phrase. Compare:
  They looked at the evidence and realised that there had been a miscarriage of justice.
  The evidence *revealed that there had been a miscarriage of justice.* (= nominalised)
- Nominalised language is especially typical of formal, scientific and academic English:
  This interesting Australian development *was possible because of* ***the isolation of these primitive mammals.***
- Nominalisation can make it easier to be impersonal. Compare:
  It's always painful when people criticise you.
  Criticism *is always painful.* (= nominalised)

3 *HAVE A ...*, *MAKE A...*, ETC.

We use a number of verbs, e.g. *look, laugh, comment,* etc., as nouns with verbs such as *give, have, make, take*:

He ***gave a short laugh.*** *Let's* ***have a quick look.***
She ***made some remark*** *about his smelly feet.*

- We do this especially if we want to use an adjective before the noun – this is more common than using a verb and adverbial phrase:
  We ***had a long talk*** *about it.*
- Sometimes there is no comparable adverbial phrase:
  She sat down and ***had a good cry.***
- This is partly a matter of collocation:
  give a shout / sigh / hug / welcome / look
  have a look / belief / chat / fall / sleep
  have belief / respect
  take a look / bath / walk / photograph / holiday
  make a comment / start / claim ***make progress***

? check

Underline the nominalised phrases in these examples.

a A sharp fall in the value of sterling followed speculation about the government's economic policy.
(Sterling fell sharply in value because people were speculating about what the government planned to do about the economy.)

b The total eradication of smallpox was the direct result of an intensive programme of immunisation.
(Smallpox was totally eradicated because everyone was immunised in a programme that was very intensive.)

c It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. (*Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen: meaning 'Everyone knows it is true that a single man who has a good fortune must want to be married.')