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Ways of Expressing Emphasis in English

In English, there are different ways of adding emphasis to a sentence or part of it. Following are some of them.

I) On particular occasions, we can give special emphasis to a part of sentence by stressing the pronunciation of a word, or words, that we consider important. Such a way of adding emphasis is common:

1. When we give **short answers**. For example:

A: Do you study English here?
B: Yes, I **do**.

A: Are you interested in literature?
B: Yes, I **am**.

2. When we **contradict** what someone has said (in this latter case, if the sentence is affirmative, we stress the auxiliaries, among them **do, does, did, is, are, am, was, has**, etc.). For example:

A: You broke the window.
B: I **didn't**; **John** did it.

A: You didn't see us.
B: I **did** see you. You were at McDonald's.

A: Mary doesn't speak German.
B: Mary **does** speak German! She lived in Germany for 10 years.

A: Which shirt did you wear, the blue one?
B: I didn't wear the **blue** shirt; I wore the **red** one.

A: You weren't working last night.
B: I **was** working last night. Ask Mom.

A: The Joneses haven't moved out.
B: They **have** moved out.
They're living in Chicago now.

II) We can also add emphasis by transforming a sentence, or part of it, into a **subordinate clause**. Here are some of the most common patterns.

1a. NOUN CLAUSE + CONJ. VERB¹ (usu. **is/was**) + $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{NOUN PHRASE} \\ \text{or} \\ \text{NOUN PHRASE + ADJ. CLAUSE} \\ \text{(subject complement)} \end{array} \right.$

(subj. of sentence)

¹ CONJ. VERB stands for "conjugated verb", i.e., a verb with the endings **-es** (3rd person), **-ed** (past), etc.

Discipline and organization made it an army.

⇒ What made it an army was discipline and organization.

Conceited people annoy me.

⇒ What annoys me is people who are conceited.

She wants to live in the United States.

⇒ Where she wants to live is in the United States.

I saw John last night.

⇒ Who I saw last night was John.

I would like to marry a sincere woman.

⇒ Who I would like to marry is a woman who is sincere.

1b. NOUN CLAUSE + CONJ. VERB (usu. **is/was**) + THE WAY
(subj. of sentence) } or } (THAT) ADJ. CLAUSE
THE FACT }
[(subject complement)]

The way it was organized made it an army.

⇒ What made it an army was the way it was organized.

Some teachers treat their students badly. I hate that.

⇒ What I hate is the way some teachers treat their students.

Many people are starving. The government does not realize that.

⇒ What the government does not realize is the fact that many people are starving.

My friends always celebrate my birthday. I appreciate this.

⇒ What I appreciate is the fact that my friends always celebrate my birthday.

NOTICE that **the way that** refers to the **manner** in which something is done; **the fact that** refers to a **thing or object** (usually to the **direct object** of a second sentence).

2. NOUN PHRASE + CONJ. VERB (usu. **is/was**) + NOUN CLAUSE
(subj. of sentence) (subj. compl.)

Drill transformed these men into an army.

⇒ Drill is what transformed these men into an army.

Listening to the radio entertains me.

⇒ Listening to the radio is what entertains me.

Helen works in a book store

⇒ Helen is who works in a bookstore.

NOTICE that the predicate is transformed into a noun clause (i.e., a subject complement).

3. IT + CONJ VERB (usu. is/was) + NOUN PHRASE + ADJ. CLAUSE
(subj.) [_____subj. complement _____]

Pairs of individuals thrust at each other.

⇒ It is pairs of individuals who thrust at each other.

His bragging annoys me.

⇒ It is his bragging that annoys me.

John broke the window.

⇒ It was John who broke the window.

NOTICE that the whole sentence is transformed into a noun phrase followed by an adjective clause (which is a subject complement).

III) Sometimes, we can add emphasis by moving a sentence element to the beginning of the sentence, which causes an inversion in the position of the subject and the auxiliary verb (Note: if the sentence does not have an auxiliary, you must supply it: either **do**, **does** or **did**). This is common in writing and in formal speaking. Here some common cases of inversion.

1. When we begin the sentence with a negative adverbial, such as *never, never again, nowhere, not for one minute, not since, not until, rarely, seldom, no sooner...(than), hardly...(when), hardly ever, at no time, in no way, on no account, not only...(but also)*. For example:

He had never eaten such a huge meal.

⇒ Never had he eaten such a huge meal.

I rarely go to the cinema.
⇒ Rarely do I go to the cinema.

We had no sooner sat down to dinner than there came an explosion from the kitchen.
⇒ No sooner had we sat down to dinner than there came an explosion from the kitchen.

I did not allow myself to consider the issue until I reached home.
⇒ Not until I reached home did I allow myself to consider the issue.

You will come across a more hospitable nation nowhere.
⇒ Nowhere will you come across a more hospitable nation.

The two strangers had hardly arrived when the majority of the guests left.
⇒ Hardly had the two strangers arrived when the majority of the guests left.

I will on no account compromise my ideals.
⇒ On no account will I compromise my ideals.

Mr. Smith was never informed at any time.
⇒ At no time was Mr. Smith ever informed.

The government can in no way deny its guilt.
⇒ In no way can the government deny its guilt.

2. When we begin the sentence with the restrictive expressions *little, only when, only after*. For example:

I realized the value of my parents' advice only when I myself became a parent.
⇒ Only when I myself became a parent did I realize the value of my parents' advice.

Mary admitted that she had stolen the jewellery only after her father was imprisoned.
⇒ Only after her father was imprisoned did Mary admit that she had stolen the jewellery.

We realized little the seriousness of the situation.
⇒ Little did we realize the seriousness of the situation.

3. When we begin a **conditional sentence** with either the auxiliary *had, should* or *were*. (Note: **if** is omitted.) For example:

If you had arrived a minute earlier, you would have seen a most remarkable sight.
⇒ Had you arrived a minute earlier, you would have seen a most remarkable sight.

If you should ever come to London, come to visit me.
⇒ Should you ever come to London, come to visit me.

If he were to realize the danger he was in, he would not proceed with his plan.
⇒ Were he to realize the danger he was in, he would not proceed with his plan.

- IV) When we use, in noun and adjective clauses, compounds of the relative pronouns **what/who/ whom/which** and of the subordinating conjunctions **when/where/how + ‘-ever’** to express the idea ‘no matter/it doesn’t matter what/who/whom/when/where/ which/how’. For example:

Well, I like it whatever you might think.

Ask whomever you want.

Take whichever you want.

Come visit me whenever you want.

- NOTES: 1) The compounds of **what/who/ whom/which/ when/where/how + ‘-ever’** can also express the idea of ignorance, indifference, or something not precisely specified. For example:

Give this to Mary, or Marie, whatever her name is.

I’ll ring you at 8:00 or 8:30, whenever I get the time.

2. When “-EVER” forms compounds with the question words **what/who/ whom/which/ when/where/how**, it expresses surprise and has the informal meaning of “on earth”. For example:

Whoever is that woman talking to your sister?

(⇒ Who on earth is that woman....?)

However did you manage to save so much money so quickly?

(⇒ How on earth did you manage to save so much money so quickly?)

Whatever did you do that for? (⇒ What on earth did you do that for?)