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. VERB\(^1\) (usu. is/was) + NOUN PHRASE (subj. of sentence) or NOUN PHRASE + ADJ. CLAUSE (subject complement)

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\(^1\) 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. THE FACT CLAUSE
   [__ (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 book store.

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?)