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PROFESSIONAL ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SOLUTIONS

Understanding Information Structure in English

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Outline

- 1 **What is Information Structure**
- 2 **Basic Principles**
- 3 **When Principles Conflict**
- 4 **Takeaways**



Core Approach

Writing from the writer's point of view

VS.

Writing from the reader's point of view



What's the focal point?



Can you find the panda?





Basic IS Principles

1. Main clause

Example: **I am going out for a walk** even though it's raining.

2. End weight

Example: Although he drinks a lot, **Jeasung is a caring father, a fine colleague, and an altogether a nice guy.**



Basic IS Principles

3. End placement

Example: This study examined **the relationship between achieved blood pressure and risk of myocardial infarction among patients treated for hypertension.**

Compare: **The relationship between achieved blood pressure and risk of myocardial infarction among patients treated for hypertension** was examined in this study.



Basic IS Principles

4. Given-new information structure

Readers expect writers to communicate

“old information” before *“new information”*.



Information Structure

Exercise:

- 1) Although Jaesung drinks a lot, he's a nice guy.
- 2) Although Jaesung is a nice guy, he drinks a lot.
- 3) Jaesung is a nice guy, but he drinks a lot.
- 4) Jaesung drinks a lot, but he is a nice guy.



End Placement

Example: Which reply sounds better?

Question: When are you going to take the exam?

Reply (1). I am going to take the exam next month.

Reply (2). Next month, I am going to take the exam.



End Weight

◆ **Compare: Which sentence sounds better?**

- 1) An increase in glucose intolerance in people over sixty-five as well as in people with a high body mass index is a common assumption in diabetes research.
- 2) A common assumption in diabetes research is that glucose intolerance increases in people over sixty-five as well as in people with a high body mass index.



Given-New IS Principle

A. Ways to handle given information

1. Use pronouns
2. Repeat key terms exactly
3. Use “*this*” + summary word
4. Use “*this*” + interpretive word



Given Info: Use Pronouns

Exercise: Use appropriate pronouns.

The weather in January was much warmer than usual.

- a. *It* was the second warmest on record.
- b. *This* was the second warmest on record.
- c. *This* was even warmer than December.
- d. *It* was even warmer than December.



Given Info: Use Pronouns

Exercise:

The weather in January was much warmer than usual.

- e. *It* led to large savings in snow removal costs.
- f. *This* led to large savings in snow removal costs.
- g. *This* may be connected to global warming trends.
- h. *It* may be connected to global warming trends.



Given Info: Repeat Key Terms

Example:

1. Tyson et al. abruptly occluded the venae cavae before analyzing the heart beats. As a result of **this**, the volume of the right heart rapidly increased.



Given Info: Repeat Key Terms

Exercise:

1. Tyson et al. abruptly occluded the venae cavae before analyzing the heart beats. As a result of this _____, the volume of the right heart rapidly increased.



Given Info: Repeat Key Terms

Exercise:

2. Our aim was to assess the mechanisms involved in the beneficial effects of hydralazine on ventricular function in patients who have chronic aortic insufficiency. For this _____, we did a radionuclide study of ventricular function in 15 patients at rest and during supine exercise.



Use “this” + Summary Word

Exercise:

1. Appropriate footwear is the most important tool that we can give patients with LOPS to use as part of their overall preventive strategy. This _____ has recently been challenged by a large prospective footwear study.



Use “this” + Summary Word

Exercise:

2. In recent years, the number of students applying to Ph.D. programs has increased steadily, while the number of places available has remained constant. This _____ has resulted in intense competition for admission.



Use “this” + Interpretive Word

Exercise:

1. According to a recent survey, 26% of all American adults, down from 38% 30 years ago, now smoke. This _____ can be partly attributed to the mounting evidence linking smoking and fatal diseases, such as cancer.



Basic IS Principles

4. Given-new information structure

Readers expect writers to communicate

“old information” before *“new information”*.



Given-New IS Principle

◆ Compare: Which sentence sounds better?

1. Younghee spends her Saturday nights at Sweet Bakery.
Mr. Kim owns the bakery. Mr. Kim has been making pastries the French way after opening the bakery in 1995.
2. Younghee spends her Saturday nights at Sweet Bakery.
The bakery is owned by Mr. Kim. Mr. Kim opened the shop in 1995 and has been making pastries the French way.



Given-New IS Principle

◆ **Compare: Which sentence sounds better?**

3. Smith abruptly occluded the venae cavae before analyzing the heart beats. As a result of this occlusion, the volume of the right heart rapidly increased.
4. Smith abruptly occluded the venae cavae before analyzing the heart beats. The volume of the right heart rapidly increased as a result of this occlusion.



Given-New IS Principle

◆ Compare: Which sentence sounds better?

5. Our aim was to assess the mechanisms involved in the beneficial effects of hydralazine on ventricular function in patients who have chronic aortic insufficiency. For this assessment, we did a radionuclide study of ventricular function in 15 patients at rest and during supine exercise.
6. Our aim was to assess the mechanisms involved in the beneficial effects of hydralazine on ventricular function in patients who have chronic aortic insufficiency. We did a radionuclide study of ventricular function in 15 patients at rest and during supine exercise for this assessment.



Given-New IS Principle

◆ **Compare: Which sentence sounds better?**

7. Jingu Park received his MS degree in computer science from XXX and is now working at the Institute of Computer Technology. **He is currently working on information systems as a researcher at the Institute.**
8. Jingu Park received his MS degree in computer science from XXX and is now working at the Institute of Computer Technology. **As a researcher at the Institute, he is currently working on information systems.**



Exercise

That humans are as individual and varied as their fingerprints is the problem. Sometimes this wonderful _____ does not matter and the drugs that doctors prescribe, such as antibiotics, painkillers and statins, work nicely. At other times this matters a great deal. This can mean the difference between success or failure in treating a disease, and this can lead to dangerous, or even fatal, side-effects.



Violations of IS

A. The main clause includes old information.

Compare: Which sentence sounds better?

1. Wearing gloves was recommended by the hospital.
Although I didn't use them that often, I knew we **had them** there.
2. Wearing gloves was recommended by the hospital.
I knew we **had them** there although I didn't use them that often.



Violations of IS

B. The information structure is deliberately violated.

Examples:

1. **Although the risks are high**, Kaesong Industrial Complex has to be restarted immediately.
2. Kaesong Industrial Complex has to be restarted immediately **although the risks are very high.**



Violations of IS

Examples:

3. Postmyocardial infarction VSD almost always causes **usually severe** hemodynamic instability; thus **although the risks are high**, intervention is usually indicated.
4. Postmyocardial infarction VSD almost always causes hemodynamic instability, **usually severe**; thus intervention is usually indicated **although the risks are high**.

When the Principles Conflict



- ◆ Compare: IS structure vs. “*it is..*”
 1. It may take them a little while, but **it is important that** you contact them to make a housing application and let them know of your needs.
 2. It may take them a little while, but that you contact them to make a housing application and let them know of your needs **is important.**

When the Principles Conflict

◆ Compare: IS structure vs. existential “*there*”

1. **There are** many people who believe that vitamins and minerals are essentially the same type of nutrient.
2. Many people who believe that vitamins and minerals are essentially the same type of nutrient **exist**.

When the Principles Conflict

◆ Compare: IS structure vs. passive voice

1. We went to see a movie. **Steven Spielberg directed the movie.** He has made a lot of popular movies, such as ET, Jaws, Indiana Jones, and Schindler's List.
2. We went to see a movie. **The movie was directed by Steven Spielberg.** He has made a lot of popular movies, such as ET, Jaws, Indiana Jones, and Schindler's List.



Takeaways

From the writer's point of view

- ✓ Produce grammatical sentences
- ✓ Pay attention to style

From the reader's point of view

- ✓ Try to understand structure
- ✓ Try to comprehend text based on IS principles
- ✓ Try to interpret the author's intention



Useful Links

[Academic Phrasebank]

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>

[Scientific Writing Resource (Cohesion, Coherence, and Emphasis)]

<https://cgi.duke.edu/web/sciwriting/index.php?action=lesson2>

[Given-before-new principle]

<http://grammar.about.com/od/fh/g/Given-Before-New-Principle.htm>