Advanced Tips for Writing in English as a Second Language

Here are a few “rules” that can help you write more complex sentences and improve your texts.

1. **Indirect/embedded questions:** In direct questions, the subject and the verb are inverted (e.g. “Are verbally fluent students more interested in intellectual matters and demonstrating a high degree of intelligence?”). Indirect questions follow the standard word order (i.e. subject-verb) and end with a period rather than a question mark. Insert the words if or whether before the question. If the original question already contains a conjunction (when, because, etc.) or an interrogative pronoun/adjective (what, who, why, how, etc.), keep it. Adjust all tenses and pronouns.

   **Examples:**
   “He asked why verbally fluent students were more interested in intellectual matters and demonstrating a higher degree of intelligence.”
   "Rodney phoned. He wants to know what you want on tomorrow's front page. And Miss Wallace wants to know if she should allow Rodney to continue using your office for the news meetings." (Elizabeth George, In the Presence of the Enemy. Bantam, 1996)

   **Try it:**
   - “What will the price of oil be next year?” → It is unclear what the price of oil will be next year.
   - “Is it possible to develop a reliable earthquake warning system?” → The question remains whether ....
   - “How is this policy implemented in rural areas?” → Current studies provide little information on ...
   - “To what extent is persistence a major factor in graduate student success?” → It might be interesting to know...
   - “What are the differences between electrical engineering and electronic engineering?” → A questionnaire was distributed in order to determine...

2. **Unreal conditional:** There are 4 types of conditional structures. You may use these types of structures when evaluating journal articles, methods or theoretical models used in a particular study, or previous research conclusions. Note: should expresses a strongly negative comment, while would and could are less strong. Should have is a criticism, could have is a suggestion/regret, and might have is a weak suggestion.

   - Conditional zero expresses a statement that is generally or always true and uses the present tense or imperative (e.g. “If the cost of designing and developing a complex integrated circuit is too high, spread it across millions of production units.”)
Conditional one expresses a real possibility and uses the present and the future (e.g. “If the controllers are correctly designed, dynamic systems will behave in the desired manner.”)

Conditional two expresses an unreal/improbable possibility and uses the simple past and would+verb (e.g. “If researchers today tried experiments that caused extreme emotional stress to the participants, these studies would violate the Canadian Code of Conduct for Research Involving Humans.”)

Conditional three expresses a regret, something unreal, and uses the past perfect and would/could/should+have+past participle of the verb (e.g. “This article could have been more persuasive if the author had related the findings to previous work on the topic.”)

Try it:
- “TESOL methodologies in the last four decades have successfully upheld classroom monolingualism.” -> If there had not been a pedagogical reaction to grammar-translation methods in the 1970’s...
- “Researchers are beginning to differentiate between the language-translation method and the use of local resources to scaffold learning in content classrooms.” -> The use of local resources to scaffold learning would not be happening if researchers...
- “The banking model of language learning and teaching complemented global capitalism.” -> If there had not been capitalism, ...

3. Inversions (emphatic sentences): You already know that English usually requires an inverted word order for questions. You also probably know that a different word order is required if a “negative” word is used in a sentence.

Example: “Not only has the author presented some valuable new information, he has also presented it in a very clear and coherent manner.”

Example: “In no case do the authors provide any statistical information about their results.”

Notice how the auxiliary verb precedes the subject, as in a question. Now look at this statement, first inverted, then in normal word order:

Inverted word order: “Particularly prominent were functional strategies…”
Normal word order: “Functional strategies... were particularly prominent.”

This kind of inversion occurs with expressions that are emphatic (e.g., “particularly”) or comparative (e.g., “even more”). It is a strong highlighting device and should only be used for special emphasis, as when we want to single out one result/fault/problem from many others.

Six typical expressions follow. Try to complete them: “particularly important…” “Especially interesting…” “Much less expected…” “Rather more significant…” “Especially noteworthy…” “Of great concern…”

This handout is based on “Academic Writing for Graduate Students” by Swales and Feak, 2014.
www.c4w.arts.ualberta.ca ph. 780.492.2639 centreforwriters@ualberta.ca