Word Order

CEFR C2 · Constituent order at the limits: theme, rhythm, style and deviation

WS1 Theme–Rheme & Markedness · WS2 Corpus, Register & Rhythm · WS3 Deliberate Deviation & Voice · WS4 Scholarly Analysis & Writing · Answer Key

Worksheet 1: Theme–Rheme & Markedness

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: What the Clause Is About, and What It Says

In the Hallidayan account, the **theme** is the clause's point of departure (its first constituent); the **rheme** is what is said about it. An **unmarked** theme is the grammatical subject; a **marked** theme fronts something else (an adjunct, complement, or object) for cohesion or emphasis. Skilled writers manage thematic progression to steer a text.

Theme type	Example (theme in bold)	Function
Unmarked	**The negotiations** collapsed.	default; subject as theme
Marked (adjunct)	**After months of talks**, they collapsed.	frames circumstance
Marked (complement)	**Deeply unpopular** the tax remained.	foregrounds the quality
Marked (object)	**That** I cannot accept.	contrast / cohesion

Part A – Identify and Remotivate the Theme

For each, name the theme, say whether it is marked, and state why the writer chose it.

#	Sentence	Theme / marked? / why
1	"Gone were the certainties of the old order."	
2	"Such arguments the court has repeatedly rejected."	
3	"What remained was a single, stubborn doubt."	
4	"Little of the original text survives."	

Part B – Manage Thematic Progression

Reorder the second and third sentences so each theme links to the previous rheme (a "linear" progression), improving cohesion.

> *The study identified three risks. Investors were most alarmed by the first risk. A collapse in liquidity was what it described.*

_____

Score: _____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Corpus, Register & Rhythm

Name: _____ *Date:* _____ *Level: C2 (CEFR)*

Reference: Ordering Signatures by Register

Corpora reveal register-linked ordering preferences: academic prose front-loads long, complex noun-phrase themes; conversation favours left-dislocation (*My brother, he…*) and end-placed afterthoughts; legal prose fronts conditions (*Provided that…*); journalism front-loads the newsworthy. Beyond grammar, the **rhythm** of ordering — where stress falls, how weight is balanced — is itself a stylistic variable.

Register	Ordering signature
Academic	heavy NP themes; extraposition; end-weighted clauses
Conversation	left-dislocation; right-dislocation afterthoughts; ellipsis
Legal	fronted conditionals; embedded qualifiers; binomials
Journalism	front-loaded key facts; appositive stacking
Literary	marked themes and inversion for cadence and image

Part A – Identify the Register from the Ordering

#	Sentence	Register & evidence
1	"Provided that notice is given, the lease may be terminated."	
2	"My neighbour, the one with the van, he sorted it out."	
3	"Down the boulevard, past the shuttered cafés, she walked."	
4	"Killed in the blast were three aid workers and a driver."	

Part B – Recast Across Registers

Take the proposition *The minister resigned after the report was leaked* and order it as: (a) an academic sentence; (b) a headline; (c) a conversational turn with dislocation.

1. (a) _____
2. (b) _____
3. (c) _____

Part C – Order for Rhythm

Rewrite so the sentence ends on a short, stressed beat: "The proposal, which had been drafted in haste and revised repeatedly under pressure from every side, ultimately failed."

_____

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Deliberate Deviation & Voice

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: Marked Order as an Instrument

At C2, heavily marked orderings — extreme fronting, discontinuous constituents, inversion cascades, dislocation — cease to be errors and become instruments of voice, provided the effect is legible and the unmarked order recoverable. The line between artistry and clumsiness is **control**.

Device	Effect	Example
Extreme fronting	emphasis; suspense	**This**, and this alone, they feared.
Left-dislocation	topic-setting; voice	**The witness** — she never showed.
Right-dislocation	afterthought; clarity	It's brilliant, **that idea of yours**.
Inversion cascade	rhetorical build	Down came the walls; up rose the dust.
Discontinuity	weight management	A rumour spread **that no one could confirm**.

Part A – Name the Device and Its Effect

1. "Beautiful, the view was; treacherous, the path." _____
2. "That plan of theirs, it never stood a chance." _____
3. "So sudden was the change, so complete, that none foresaw it." _____
4. "He returned at last, the man they had written off." _____

Part B – Deviate with Control

Rewrite each neutral sentence using the device named; note the effect and the recoverable unmarked order.

#	Neutral	Deviated + effect
1	They feared only one thing. (extreme fronting)	
2	Your proposal is remarkable. (right-dislocation)	
3	The rebellion was sudden and total, so no one foresaw it. (inversion)	

Part C – Pastiche

Write a short paragraph (4–5 sentences) that orchestrates word order for effect: one marked theme, one inversion, one dislocation. Annotate each choice in a line beneath.

#	Line
1	
2	

3	
4	
5	
6	

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Scholarly Analysis & Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Part A – Critical Text Analysis

> Word order, we are taught, is fixed in English — and so, in its bones, it is. Yet within that fixity lies a surprising licence. Fronting, inversion, dislocation, the cleft: each bends the default without breaking it, and each does so for a reason. What the grammarian calls "marked" the rhetorician calls "emphatic"; what the corpus calls "low-frequency" the stylist calls "arresting". Rarely is a marked ordering neutral. Chosen well, it steers attention; chosen badly, it merely trips the reader. Between the two lies everything we mean by style.

1. Identify every marked ordering in the passage (fronting, inversion, cleft, dislocation) and state the unmarked equivalent of each.
2. The passage twice uses the frame "What the X calls A, the Y calls B." Analyse how this parallel fronting structures the argument.
3. "Rarely is a marked ordering neutral" inverts after a fronted adverb. Discuss the effect of choosing inversion over the neutral order here.
4. Evaluate the final sentence as a piece of rhetoric: how does its ordering and rhythm reinforce its claim?

Part B – Extended Scholarly Writing

Write the opening two paragraphs (220–260 words) of a scholarly essay on: "English word order is rigid in its syntax but free in its rhetoric."

Requirements — include and underline: (1) one **marked theme** (fronting) serving cohesion; (2) one **inversion** for effect; (3) one **cleft**; (4) one **metalinguistic term** (theme/ rheme, markedness, end-focus, end-weight, dislocation) used correctly; (5) two **epistemic hedges** calibrated to each claim; (6) one **conjunct** that maps the argument's logic precisely.

#	Line
1	
2	
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8	

Features: _____ / 6 Word count: _____ Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C2 Level, Word Order

Worksheet 1 – Part A (model)

1 Theme "Gone" (fronted complement + subject–verb inversion) — marked; foregrounds loss, defers the heavy subject. · 2 Theme "Such arguments" (fronted object) — marked; links back to prior discourse and sets up contrast with the court's response. · 3 Theme "What remained" (wh-cleft theme) — marked; packages given information, spotlights the doubt as new. · 4 Theme "Little of the original text" (fronted quantified subject) — arguably unmarked (it is the subject) but the negative quantifier lends emphasis.

Worksheet 1 – Part B (model)

The study identified three risks. The first of these alarmed investors most. What it described was a collapse in liquidity. (Each theme picks up the previous rheme: risks → the first → what it described.)

Worksheet 2 – Part A (model)

1 Legal — fronted conditional "Provided that…", modal *may*, passive. · 2 Conversation — left-dislocation ("My neighbour … he"), appositive aside. · 3 Literary — fronted directional adverbials + inversion for cadence and image. · 4 Journalism — passive inversion front-loading the newsworthy ("Killed in the blast were…").

Worksheet 2 – Part B (model)

(a) The minister's resignation followed the leaking of the report. (b) Minister quits after report leak. (c) You know the minister? Resigned, he did — soon as that report got out.

Worksheet 2 – Part C (model)

Drafted in haste and revised repeatedly under pressure from every side, the proposal ultimately failed. (Reward any recast ending on a short, stressed beat such as "…it failed" / "…failed".)

Worksheet 3 – Part A

1 fronted-complement inversion (parallel) — poised, aphoristic contrast. · 2 left-dislocation — conversational topic-setting, disdain. · 3 "So … was" inversion cascade — rhetorical build, inevitability. · 4 right-dislocation (appositive afterthought) — delayed reveal, poignancy.

Worksheet 3 – Part B (model)

1 One thing, and one thing only, they feared. (unmarked: They feared only one thing.) · 2 It's remarkable, that proposal of yours. (unmarked: Your proposal is remarkable.) · 3 So sudden and total was the rebellion that no one foresaw it. (unmarked: The rebellion was so sudden and total that…)

Assess intentionality: the marked order must produce a legible effect and the unmarked order must be recoverable. A dislocation that merely looks like a false start scores nothing.

Worksheet 4 – Part A (model)

1 "so … it is" (fronted "so" + inversion) → it is so in its bones; "Fronting, inversion, dislocation, the cleft: each bends…" (fronted list resumed by "each"); "What the grammarian calls 'marked'…" (fronted object clause) → The rhetorician calls what the grammarian calls "marked" "emphatic"; "Rarely is a marked ordering neutral" (negative-adverb inversion) → A marked ordering is rarely neutral; "Between the two lies everything…" (place inversion) → Everything we mean by style lies between the two. · 2 The parallel fronting ("What the X calls A, the Y calls B")

sets two vocabularies side by side, enacting the equivalence it asserts and giving the argument balanced, chiastic structure. · 3 Inversion after "Rarely" lends the generalisation formal weight and rhythm, and throws focus onto "neutral" — a plain "A marked ordering is rarely neutral" would read flatter. · 4 The closing sentence uses place inversion ("Between the two lies…") to defer the heavy, climactic subject ("everything we mean by style") to end-focus, landing the thesis on the final stressed word.

Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor at C2	Marks
Marked theme / fronting	Serves cohesion; unmarked order recoverable	0–6
Inversion	Used for demonstrable effect, correctly formed	0–5
Cleft	Correctly formed; focus motivated	0–5
Metalinguistic accuracy	Term used correctly, no overclaiming	0–5
Epistemic calibration	Two hedges matched to claim strength	0–5
Argument & length	220–260 words; contestable claim developed	0–5

The C2 benchmark is conscious orchestration: a student who fronts an element and can explain, in a footnote, why that theme suits the argument's flow has demonstrated mastery. Ordering a native reader would not notice straining is the final target.