

It ... 1

A

We can use an introductory **it** at the beginning of a sentence –

☆ to place long or grammatically complex sentence elements at the end (the usual place for them in English). Compare:

- To drive without a licence is illegal. and*
- It is illegal** to drive without a licence.

☆ to focus attention on something by putting it at the end (the usual place for new or important information in English). Compare:

- That she wasn't hurt is a miracle. and*
- It's a miracle** that she wasn't hurt.

Introductory **it** is commonly used when the subject is a **to-infinitive** or **that-clause** (as in the examples above), and also when the subject is a **wh-** or **-ing clause** (see also Unit 25):

- It is clear** why Diego decided to leave Spain.
- It is useless** asking Sophie to help.

B

We often use introductory **it** with **be + adjective / noun** (as in the examples above), but other patterns with an introductory **it** are possible. Here are some common examples–

☆ **it + verb + to-infinitive**

- 'I've got a terrible headache.' **It helps** to lie down.'
- If you want someone to help you, **it doesn't do** to annoy them just before you ask. ('[not] do' = (not) advisable, acceptable or enough)

Also: **hurt, pay** (= give an advantage or benefit)

☆ **it + verb + object + to-infinitive**

- It shocked** him to see her looking so ill.
- It **means a lot** to get a place at university.

Also: **amaze, annoy, astonish, concern, cost, frighten, hurt, scare, surprise, upset, worry** (most are to do with feelings)

After these verbs the object usually refers to a person.

We can also use **it + take + object + to-infinitive** when we say what is or was needed in a particular activity; for example, time, resources or characteristics needed. Compare:

- It takes a lot of effort** to play the flute. and
- To play the flute takes a lot of effort.

☆ **it + verb + that-clause**

- It seems** that she has lost her memory.
- It emerged** that he already had a criminal record.

Also: **appear, come about, follow, happen, transpire**

☆ **it + verb + object + that-clause**

- It suddenly hit** me that Sara wanted to borrow money. (*less likely is* That Sara wanted to borrow money suddenly hit me.)

Also: **dawn on, not bother, strike** (= occur to), **turn out**, and the highlighted verbs above

The object in this pattern usually refers to a person.

C

We don't usually use an **it ...** pattern as an alternative to a **noun** as subject:

- Their success** was unexpected. (*not* It was unexpected their success.)

However, in informal contexts, particularly in speech, this is quite common in order to give special emphasis to the information immediately following **it ...**:

- It tastes really good**, this new ice cream.

and also to place a longer noun phrase at the end in order to focus attention on it:

- It's ridiculous**, all the bureaucracy involved in running a school these days.

Exercises

96.1 Rewrite these sentences beginning **It ...** but only if they would be correct written English; otherwise write **✓** and consider why an **It ...** sentence would be inappropriate. **A & C**

- 1 That we continue to monitor the situation is important.
It is important that we continue to monitor the situation.
- 2 How he stared straight at me was unsettling.
- 3 Francesco's excellent exam result was surprising.
- 4 To be a qualified driver is an advantage in the job.
- 5 Her proposal is quite radical.
- 6 To put carpet on walls is highly unusual.
- 7 Robin's new car is a Ferrari.
- 8 Finding a good plumber is hard these days.

96.2 Complete the sentences using **it ...** followed by a verb from (i) and an expanded form of the notes in (ii). Include an appropriate object where necessary. **B**

(i)

appear	astonish
not bother	concern
hurt	not do
pay	strike
upset	scare

(ii)

pedal / bicycle	seriously injured / back
see / carrying knives	plan your journey ahead
criticise / too much	hadn't even told / when / going away
everyone / see in	discover / also / successful novelist
he / jealous	hear / offended

- 1 When Laura fell heavily and lay completely still,
it appeared that she had seriously injured her back.
- 2 I knew that Lotta was a journalist for the local paper, but ...
- 3 Since I broke my ankle last year, ...
- 4 I told Peter that I had invited Hugo, too. When he became angry ...
- 5 My comment about Ben's baldness was only meant as a joke and ...
- 6 There were no curtains in his house, but ...
- 7 I didn't mind Amy not asking me to go on holiday with her, but ...
- 8 Children need a lot of praise and ...
- 9 The boys walked towards me in a threatening way, and ...
- 10 You can save money by booking tickets in advance, so ...

96.3 What personal or physical characteristics are needed to ...? Use **It takes ...** in your answers. **B**

- 1 play a musical instrument well
It takes a lot of determination to play a musical instrument well.
- 2 build your own house
.....
- 3 make a speech in front of a group of strangers
.....
- 4 explain the rules of cricket to someone who doesn't know the game
.....

Now suggest completions for these sentences.

- 5 It takes bravery ...
.....
- 6 It takes a lot of organisation to ...
.....
- 7 It takes a great deal of time ...
.....