

It... (1)

A

Instead of using a *that*-clause, *wh*-clause, *to*-infinitive clause, or *if*-clause as the subject of the sentence, we usually (and always with an *if*-clause) prefer to use a pattern with **it + be + adjective/noun + clause**. Compare:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an honour <i>that</i> Professor Bolt is attending the conference. • It is clear <i>why</i> Don decided to leave Spain. • It's very enjoyable <i>to</i> sing in a choir. • It will be surprising <i>if</i> the two countries don't reach an agreement soon. <p>These sentences are less formal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That Professor Bolt is attending the conference <i>is an honour</i>. • Why Don decided to leave Spain <i>is clear</i>. • To sing in a choir <i>is very enjoyable</i>. <p>These sentences are rather formal.</p>
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Using an *it...* pattern allows us to put these clauses at the end of the sentence, which is the usual place in English for information that is important or new.

B

In written English we don't usually use an *it...* pattern instead of sentences which begin with a noun as subject:

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

However, in spoken English this is quite common:

- It tastes really good, this new ice cream.

C

We can use a similar pattern with **it + verb + (object) + clause** using a verb other than **be**:

- It helps to have a very sharp knife when you prepare fish.
- It didn't surprise me when Pete left the company.

Some verbs are often used with **it + verb + (object) + *that*-clause**. Compare:

<i>It + verb + (object) + that-clause</i>	<i>Alternative pattern</i>
• It worried me that she drove so fast.	• I was worried that she drove so fast.
• It turned out that the bike didn't belong to him.	x



Other verbs, such as **worry**, with an alternative pattern include **amaze**, **annoy**, **bother**, **concern**, **frighten**, **please**, **surprise**. Other verbs, such as **turn out**, with *no* alternative pattern include **appear**, **come about**, **emerge**, **follow**, **happen**, **seem**, **transpire**.

D

Some verbs are commonly used with an *it...* pattern when they are in the passive and followed by a *that*-clause, *wh*-clause, or *to*-infinitive clause:

- It was agreed *that* the match should be postponed. (*not* That the match ... was agreed.)
- It is being asked *why* no action is to be taken. (*not* Why no action ... is being asked.)
- It was decided *to* celebrate his 75th birthday. (*not* To celebrate ... was decided.)



Verbs like this followed by a *that*-clause include **accept**, **agree**, **believe**, **decide**, **expect**, **hope**, **intend**, **plan**, **think**, **understand**; verbs followed by a *wh*-clause include **ask**, **decide**, **determine**, **establish**, **know**, **understand**; verbs followed by a *to*-infinitive clause include **agree**, **decide**, **hope**, **intend**, **plan**. Some verbs can be followed by more than one type of clause.

E

We can use **it** with **take** when we say what is or was needed in a particular activity; for example, the amount of time needed, or the resources or characteristics needed. Compare:

- It took the men a week to mend our roof. *and* • The men took a week to mend our roof.
- It takes a lot of effort to play the flute well. *and* • A lot of effort is needed to play the flute well.

EXERCISES

- 116.1 Rewrite these sentences beginning **It...** Rewrite them only if the **It...** sentence would be appropriate in written English; otherwise write **X** and consider why they would be inappropriate. (A & B)
- To drive a car without a licence is illegal. **It is illegal to drive a car without a licence.**
 - That she wasn't hurt in the fall was a miracle.
 - Their decision was a serious setback.
 - Where the light was coming from was far from clear.
 - The announcement is to be made this evening.
 - That you already know my secret is obvious.
 - If the two countries don't reach an agreement soon will be surprising.
 - The parcel I was expecting has arrived.

- 116.2 Match the sentences and write ones beginning with **It...that...**, as in 1. A number of alternative answers are possible. (C)
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| 1 The President will be re-elected. | a This transpired during the trial. |
| 2 Beckman had a wrist injury for most of the match. | b This follows from the results of the survey. |
| 3 This was to be the band's last world tour. | c This appears likely. |
| 4 Jacobs possessed three handguns. | d This seemed to be the case. |
| 5 People are happy with the quality of supermarket food. | e This emerged after the concert. |

Example: 1 + (c) **It appears likely that the President will be re-elected.**

- 116.3 Expand one of the sets of notes to continue these newspaper extracts. Use a sentence with **It**, a present passive verb form, **that-**, or **wh-**clause. (D)

believe / men escaped through / broken window
 plan / hold / competition again next year
 not yet understand / accident happened
~~hope / the work / completed by next month~~
 expect / around 100, 000 people / attend the rally
 not know / the robbery was not reported earlier



- Major repair work is continuing on the Channel Tunnel. **It is hoped that the work will be completed by next month.**
- The organisers have hailed the first world skateboarding championships as a great success.
- Police have confirmed that the painting was taken last week.
- An anti-fox hunting protest will be held in London today.
- More than 20 inmates escaped from Leyton top security jail last night.
- Two light aircraft collided on the runway at Orly Airport yesterday.

- 116.4 What personal or physical characteristics are needed to...? (Use **It takes...** in your answers.) (D)
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|-------------------|--------------------------|
| climb a mountain | teach small children |
| go bungee jumping | learn a foreign language |

Example: **It takes a lot of stamina to climb a mountain.**