

Syntax and inversion are forms of grammar.

Syntax is the “correct” order of the words in a sentence.

This is usually the subject, followed by a verb, then the object.

Inversion is when the order of the sentence is changed for a particular effect.

“The cat sat on the mat”.

This is a properly ordered sentence in English grammar.

‘Cat’ is the subject, ‘sat’ is the verb, and the mat is the object.

Syntax emphasises the subject. The cat is the most important thing.

Now let’s invert it.

“On the mat sat the cat.”

Both sentences are about the same thing, but inverting the sentence draws the reader’s attention to the mat - the object.

Think of that famous Star Wars character that talks a bit funny - Yoda.

The order of his sentences almost never follow English syntax.

“Truly wonderful the mind of a child is.”

By placing the phrase ‘truly wonderful’ at the beginning of the sentence, Yoda stresses just how amazing the mind of a child really is.

Norman MacCaig uses inversion in his poem “Sounds of the Day.”

“When a clatter came, it was horses crossing the ford.”

Here, the sound ‘clatter’ appears in the sentence before the subject that’s making the sound - the horses.

MacCaig wants the focus to be on the sound rather than the horses, as they are the most memorable moments of his day.

The sounds are what he experiences first, and he uses inversion to emphasise the volume of the noise, so that when the noises come to an end later in the poem, the contrast is obvious.

Use syntax to emphasise the subject.

To emphasise the object, use inversion!