

## Cleft Sentences

### Emphasis

If we want to give particular importance to a person, a thing or a clause in a sentence, we can use cleft sentences. Cleft sentences result from changing the normal sentence pattern to emphasise a particular piece of information. We use cleft sentences to:

- connect what is already understood to what is new to the listener, or
- to focus on a particular part of the sentence and to emphasise what we want to say

In a cleft sentence, a single message is divided (cleft) into two clauses. Because there are two clauses (parts) to the sentence it is called CLEFT (from the verb CLEAVE) which means divided into two.

*It*-clauses are the most common type of cleft clause. The information that comes after *it* is emphasised for the listener. The emphasis in the resulting cleft sentence is on the phrase after *it*+ *be*.

The clause which follows the *it*-clause is connected using *that* and it contains information that is already understood. We often omit *that* in informal situations when it is the object of the verb.

In the clauses that follow *it* + *be* + phrase, we can also use the same relative pronouns (*who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, *that*) and relative adverbs (*where*, *when*, *why*) that we normally use in defining relative clauses.

### Examples:

It is **my sweater** that Lily wore yesterday. → (Focus on sweater)  
 Lily wore my sweater (**not my skirt**) yesterday.  
 It is **yesterday** when Lily wore my sweater. → (Focus on yesterday)  
 Lily wore my sweater yesterday (**not today**).  
 It is **Lily** who/that wore my sweater yesterday. → (Focus on Lily)

Lily (**not me**) wore my sweater yesterday.

If we use a personal pronoun after *it* + *be*, it will be in the object form.

It is **her** who/that wore my sweater yesterday.

*Leonardo Da Vinci painted 'The Last Supper' between 1495-1497. (neutral sentence)*

It was **Leonardo Da Vinci** who/that painted 'The Last Supper' between 1495-1497.

It was **'The Last Supper'** that Leonardo Da Vinci painted between 1495-1497.

It was **between 1495-1497** when Leonardo Da Vinci painted 'The Last Supper'.

*Einstein discovered the theory of relativity in Germany in 1905. (neutral sentence)*

It was **Einstein** who/that discovered the Relativity Theory in Germany in 1905.

It was **the Relativity Theory** that Einstein discovered in Germany in 1905.

It was **in Germany** where Einstein discovered the Relativity Theory in 1905.

It was **in 1905** when Einstein discovered the Relativity Theory in Germany.

### What-clause

Important information can be emphasised by putting it at the end of a sentence. We put the less important information into a clause beginning with *what*, and open the sentence with *this* clause. We can then finish with the important information. The two parts of the sentence are joined with *IS* or *WAS*, since we treat the *what*-clause as singular.

**Wh- clause (with a verb) + a form of be + emphasised information**

### Examples:

**What helps her relax is listening to classical music.**

**What they hated more was his insolent remarks.**

They needed money, so **what they did was to ask relatives to invest in their project.**

The school was in a catastrophic state, so **what the teachers did was to go to the media to make this public.**

## Extra Exercises

Transform the following, emphasizing the part of the sentence which has been underlined.

I find it amazing that he can't even fry an egg.

*What I find amazing is that he can't even fry an egg.*

1. How old is she? That's what I'd like to know.

What \_\_\_\_\_.

2. He lost his job, so he started up his own business.

He lost his job, so what he \_\_\_\_\_.

3. What I enjoyed most about the film was the music.

It \_\_\_\_\_.

4. They got married in June, not in July.

It \_\_\_\_\_.

5. I didn't recognize him until he took his hat off.

It was only \_\_\_\_\_.

6. I only found out she had moved when I spoke to Jerry.

It wasn't \_\_\_\_\_.

7. I don't know what that noise is. I just switched it on, that's all.

I don't know what that noise is. All \_\_\_\_\_.

8. He thinks about his precious car and nothing else.

All \_\_\_\_\_.

### 2. Complete each of the following sentences so that they are true for you.

a. What worries me is .....

b. What I like most / least about studying/ my job is .....

c. What I'd like to know about ..... is .....

d. It was in ..... that I .....

e. I didn't enjoy ..... lessons at school. All we ever did was..... Rewrite each of the sentences using more advanced language.