



lingoda

# Cleft sentences: adding emphasis

GRAMMAR

LEVEL  
Advanced

NUMBER  
C1\_3061G\_EN

LANGUAGE  
English





## Goals

- Can recognise cleft sentences and explain how they are used to form the 'it' and 'wh-' clefts .
- Can effectively add emphasis to own speech by using cleft sentences.



Would you like to learn how to add **greater emphasis** to specific parts of your sentences?

Using a **cleft**, you can move clauses and **direct your reader's attention!**

**What you should do** is read on!



## Cleft sentences

Why might it be useful to **direct attention** to a **specific part** of a sentence?

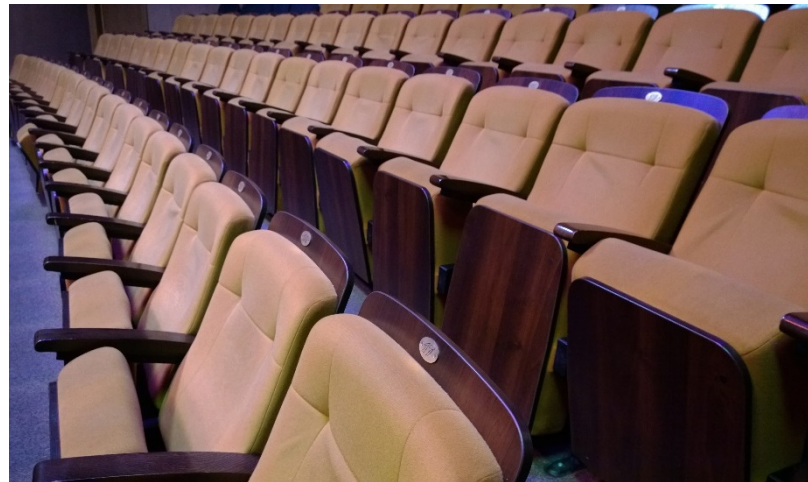




## Review

Look at the two sentences below. The structure of one of them should look familiar.

- What is interesting about the second sentence?
- What is it called?



The eager old couple sat in the back of the theater.

**In the back of the theater sat** the eager old couple.



## Inverted sentences

- **Inverted** sentences switch the **placement** of the **verb** and **subject**, creating the **feeling** of a **question**.
- Inversion is used a lot in writing but also in speech.
- Observe the sentences below, paying particular attention to the part of the sentence which draws your attention.

The cat pounced on to the mouse.

- This sentence is in **natural order** – the subject comes before the verb.

On to the mouse pounced the cat.

- When the sentence is **inverted** like so there is a different stylistic effect.





## Emphasis

- There are many reasons we might want to emphasise specific information in our communication.
- We might **split a sentence** in order to
  - **Direct** the reader to **new information**
  - Make a **strong point**
- Giving emphasis can be an effective way of **varying your written flow**, and highlighting different parts of the clause.
- Observe the effect of the emphasis in the sentences below.

We were signing the contract for our new home last summer.

**It was only last summer** that we were signing the contract for our new home.

The second sentence emphasises the fact that it was **only last summer** that the contract was signed. **Emphasis** is placed on how recently the action took place.



## cleft

**Cleft** is another word for **split**, coming from the verb **to cleave**.

Cleft sentences have been **split in two** in order to put the **focus** on one part of it.



Olaf swung his axe and **cleft** the log in two.





## Cleft sentences – it

- Cleft sentences can be divided into **it clefts** and **wh clefts**.
- **It** clauses are the **most common** type of **cleft clause**.
- **Cleft sentences** are very useful when we want to connect new information to what is already known to the listener. The structure of a **cleft sentence** allows us to **focus clearly** on the **new information**. Observe below.

You went to Brazil last year didn't you?

No, it **was Argentina that I visited!**

- The **information after it** is emphasised for the reader (or listener).

Is it **Michael** that hates going to the cinema?

- The **focus** here is **Michael**. The sentence **links new information** (Michael) with **old information** (someone hates going to the cinema).





## it structure

- **It clefts** normally introduce the focused element **early in the sentence**.
- The structure of an it cleft is typically as follows:
  - **it cleft** + **verb phrase** (main verb is usually **to be**) + **focused element** (noun clause) + **relative pronoun** (that, who, when etc.) + rest of the sentence.

- **It was Wilson who** caught the early bus to school

It + was + Wilson + who + caught the early bus to school.

Alternatively, we can use the cleft to focus on a different part of the sentence.

- **It was an early bus that** Wilson caught to school.

It + was + an early bus + that + Wilson caught to school.



## Add an **it** cleft to these sentences to add emphasis

1. Gerald played a great acoustic set last night.



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2. Phoebe decided to take a long vacation.



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3. The flight was delayed by 40 minutes.



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4. The camera was left behind carelessly on the table.



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5. My brother came home from Indonesia last Saturday.



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## Cleft sentences – ‘wh’

- Cleft sentences beginning with **wh** almost always begin with **‘what’** but can sometimes begin with **why, where, how**, etc.
- Beginning our cleft with **what** helps to create a more **conversational tone**.



**What** you should do is **go home and get a good night’s sleep**.  
‘Go home and get a good night’s sleep’ is the emphasis in this sentence.

## Emphasising whole sentences

When we want to give **emphasis** to a whole sentence instead of just one clause we can use the verb **to happen**.

This is usually in the past tense when telling a story. We say:  
**What happened was + that** (which can be omitted) + rest of the sentence.

Sometimes, if there is confusion about a situation, and someone needs clarification, we might use the present tense: **What's happening is** + rest of sentence.



Timothy missed his flight so he had to travel back to the hotel.



**What** happened **was that** Timothy missed his flight so he had to travel back to the hotel.



## Add a cleft to these sentences to add emphasis.

1. You should go back to visit your family.



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2. The detective investigated the crime scene.



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3. She travels all over the world with her job.



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4. The professor left his laptop in the car so he couldn't give his anticipated presentation.



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5. The exhibition was full of interesting artifacts so Jo decided to stay for another couple of hours.



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## What to emphasise?

- In speech we use **intonation** and **other verbal cues** to add emphasis. We don't have this option in writing – this is where cleft sentences can help.
- We might want to emphasise the **reason why** something happened.

- **The reason why** something has happened...

- I have come tonight to ask you an important question.
- **The reason why** I've come tonight **is** to ask you an important question.
- **The reason why** + **verb phrase** + conjugated verb **to be** + rest of sentence.



Emphasise the reason why in each sentence below.

Use cleft structures to emphasise the reason why underlying the actions of the sentences below.

I left the party early to get my work done.

Frederick tried yoga to improve his posture.

Yannick rode home to prepare lunch.

I've come to Peru to learn Spanish.

He told a lie to cover his tracks.

Sarah enrolled in night school to keep her mind active.

A vertical sheet of lined paper with a spiral binding on the left side, intended for writing the cleft structures.





## What to emphasise?

- In addition to wanting to emphasise a **reason why** something happened, we might want to stress **the place where** something occurred, or **the person who** is being referred to.
- It might help our clarity to specify **the day when** something happened, or even **the thing that** happened. Compare the variety of information emphasised in the sentences below.

- The place where something happened...
- The person who...
- The day when something happens...
- The thing that happened...

- **The city where** I met Andrea **was Barcelona.**
- **The person who** inspired me to learn to play piano **was my friend Mike.**
- **The day** we arrive in Geneva **is next Tuesday.**
- **The thing I find most interesting** about Roman history **is the scandal and corruption of the patricians.**



## Practice adding emphasis

**Emphasise the correct part of each of these sentences using cleft structures.**

1. Joanna came to the party to make some new friends.
2. The hostel is in a quiet district north of San Telmo.
3. I met Charlotte on Monday in a bookshop.
4. Your smile has the most powerful impression on me.
5. Samuel puts in the most effort of the entire class.



## Reply to the questions using cleft sentences

**Cleft sentences often function as a reply to a question in conversation.**

**Why did you start learning English?**

**When did you start learning English?**

**What do you like most about it?**



## Questions

- Cleft sentences often occur as a reply to a conversational question.
- We can use cleft sentences to respond to a question with a **correction** or a **contrast**.

■ Is it Mark's birthday next week?

■ No, **it was** his birthday **on Tuesday!**

The second sentence **corrects** the first.

- James must be excited about his trip. I think he is going to India.
- Actually, **it is** Tibet **he is traveling to.**





## Answer these questions using cleft sentences to correct or make a contrast to the speaker

1. It's our anniversary next week, isn't it?



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2. You have met Laura before, haven't you?



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3. It's been a strange summer, hasn't it?



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4. You're coming with us to the cinema after dinner, right?



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5. You voted for the Green party last year, didn't you?



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## Crafting questions

Write 10 questions that would prompt a cleft sentence in response. Think of question words like who, what, when, where and why!

A sheet of white lined paper with 10 horizontal lines for writing, positioned on the left side of the slide.

You remembered to bring your passport, didn't you?





## Write an email

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To: Lisa Bergmann

Subject: Sammy's birthday!!

Hi Lisa,

I've been so busy lately and Sammy's birthday has taken me by surprise...

**Write an email to your friend. You are not sure of the date of your mutual friend's birthday, or what you are going to do for a gift/surprise. Try to incorporate five questions which will prompt a cleft sentence response from your friend.**



## When to use cleft sentences

- Cleft sentences have a lot of **potential** in the hands of a writer who knows **when to use** them.
- In the sentences below you can see how the writer chooses to show which was the **most important part** of the sentence.
- Each sentence emphasises a different facet of the couple's meeting – whichever was seen to be **important** for the story.

- When?
- Where?
- Why?

- It was on a warm evening in summer that Harry met Susanna.
- It was under the eucalyptus tree that Harry met Susanna.
- It was because he happened to step out for air that Harry was lucky enough to meet Susanna.





## Pitfalls

Talk to the teacher about some potential pitfalls of using cleft sentences.

Why would overusing cleft sentences be a problem?



## When not to use cleft sentences

- While cleft sentences can **build drama** or **vary the pacing** of a piece of writing, they can feel like they take a **long time to make their point**.
- If you use too many cleft sentences, readers will **struggle to find your topic clear**. In some contexts slower paced sentences can be useful for variance. In others it is better to be direct.
- Consider the following sentences.

Whom I really want to come to my wedding next year is Anton.

- This sentence is slightly **awkward**, as the reader does not know what the topic of the sentence is until halfway through.

I really want Anton to come to my wedding next year.

- Revising the sentence to become **more direct** is much more effective in this context. Writers with an effective style know how to vary the length and rhythm of their sentences for best effect.



## Respond

**Reply to these questions using a cleft sentence by offering a solution to the speaker.**

1. My favourite mug is broken.
2. Every time I read the news I get so depressed.
3. I don't know what to buy my brother for his birthday.
4. I left my plane ticket in the taxi!
5. I think I'm going to be sick.



## Practice rewriting cleft sentences

1. My girlfriend makes the best beetroot hummus ever.



The person who makes the best beetroot hummus ever is my girlfriend.

2. The keys are hidden under the spider plant in the backyard.



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3. I enjoyed the fantastic city of Medellin most of all on my trip abroad.



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4. Get yourself on a plane to Cuba as soon as possible!



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5. The three men were whispering quietly.



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## Give advice

**Your friend has just succeeded in securing a job interview at your company. You know what the company is looking for – write them a letter giving them advice on how best to prepare for their interview. Use some of the cleft sentence forms you have learned in the lesson.**

Using the 'wh' cleft is an effective way to give advice!





## Talk to the teacher

Remember to  
keep practising!

Discuss what contexts cleft sentences might be useful in.

Try to have a conversation with your teacher, responding to questions with a cleft sentence.

“What you should do is...”

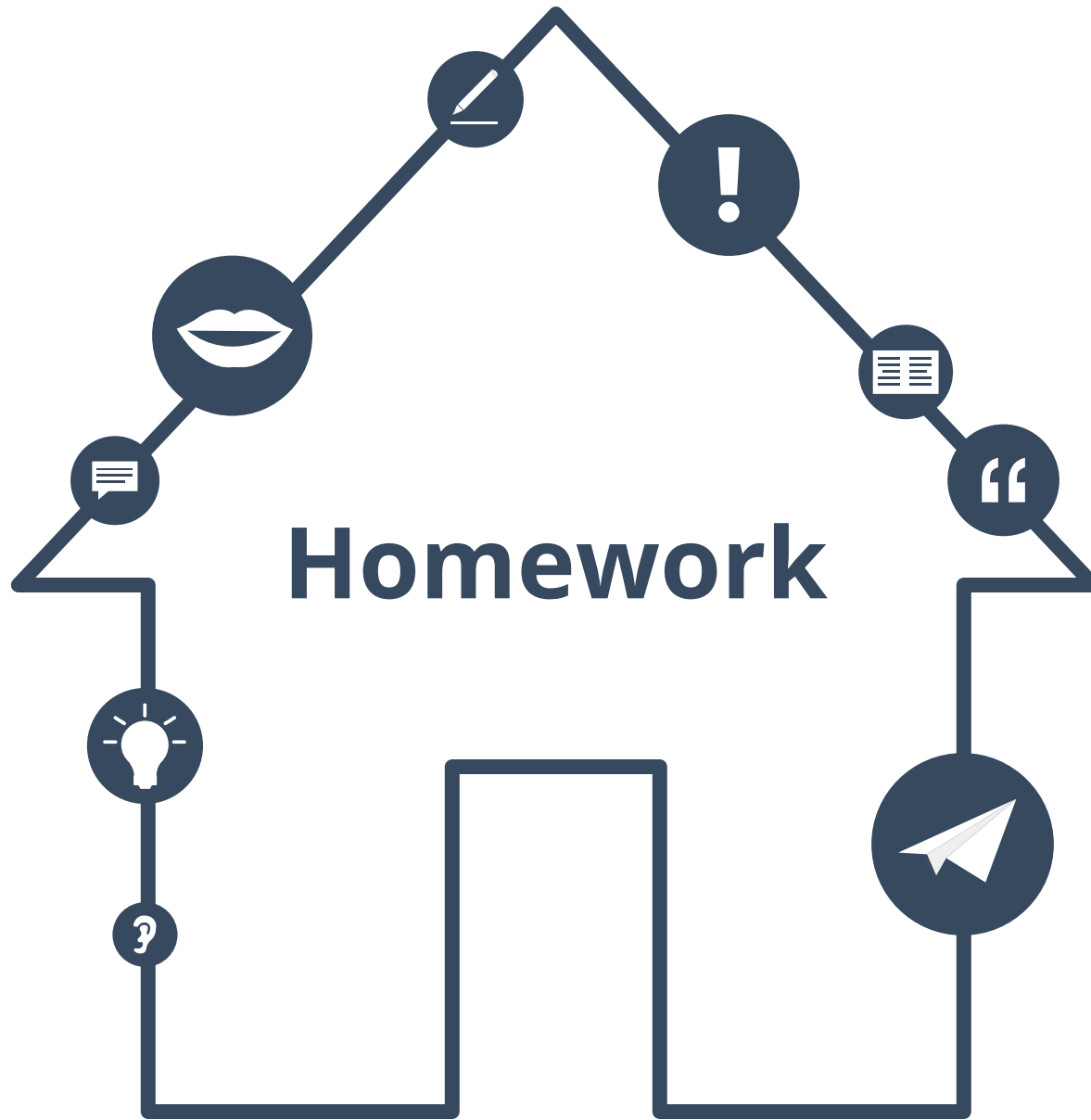


## Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!









## Evaluate the challenge

Reflect on the difficulty of the lesson.  
Did you find it difficult or easy?

A vertical sheet of white paper with a perforated left edge, containing horizontal lines for writing.



## Cleft structure practice

Practice your cleft structures by writing sentences. Remember – you can start with 'it', 'what', or any other introductions like 'the person who' or 'the reason why'.

A graphic of a spiral-bound notebook page with a light gray background and horizontal lines. A white sticky note with a torn bottom edge is placed on the page. The sticky note contains the text: "it + verb phrase+ relative pronoun + rest of the sentence". Below the sticky note, the sentence "It was Julia who introduced me to my favourite artist." is written on the notebook lines. There are several blank lines below the example sentence for practice.

it + verb phrase+ relative  
pronoun + rest of the  
sentence

It was Julia who introduced me to my  
favourite artist.



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