

English With Nimafar

Cleft Sentences

Overview:

- "Cleft Sentences" is an Advanced Grammar topic.
- At the end of this lesson, you will be better able to use more complex sentences and to focus on a specific part of your sentence.

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What are Cleft Sentences?

A Cleft Sentence is a complex sentence emphasizing an element by re-arranging the typical word order of a simple sentence with the help of a dummy word. So doing, it allows for emphasis on a specific part of the sentence.

Why Cleft Sentences?

Cleft Sentences are commonly used in our daily conversations (i.e. spoken English) so as to connect the part of a message that is already known and/or understood with the part which is new for the listener. So doing, we can put emphasis on the new part of the message about which we are willing to attract attentions.

Here are some examples:

- It was Ryan who broke the window.
- What she needs is time.
- It is our support that keeps the nation alive.
- It's in a parliament where you can find a politician.

Cleft Sentences: Types

There are many different types of cleft sentence that we can use in our sentences.

- It-Cleft
- All-Cleft

- There-Cleft
- WH-cleft
- If-Because-Cleft
- Inferential-Cleft

It-Cleft

The most common and used type is “It-Cleft”. It is the “Cleft clause” where we can see the new information. The clause that follows it contains already-understood information.

- It’s my brother who won the race.
- It’s after midnight when the city becomes quiet.
- It was his personality that impressed the interviewer the most.
- It was during the storm when the power went out.
- It was his plans that impressed the nation.

This type is followed by a “Verb Phrase”.

(That)

Generally speaking, the word “that” connects the “It-Cleft” to the clause that follows it. We can omit it if it is the object of the verb. It is normally seen in spoken English.

- It was your father David (that) I met.
It was his wife (that) the murderer murdered.

(Who) VS. (That)

When the focus is on the subject, we use who instead of that.

- It was my father who bought me a car.
- It was Ryan who got fired last night.
- It is David who helps me every day.

Plural or Singular?

It does not matter! Just the main verb becomes plural provided that you have a plural subject.

- It is the teachers who act as a bridge between generations.
- It was the girls who won the match.
- It was the managers who were being blamed for their poor behaviors.

Interrogative

- Was it the girls who won the match?
- Was it the managers who were being blamed for their poor behaviors?

Negative

- It wasn't the girls who won the match.
- It wasn't the managers who were being blamed for their poor behaviors.

All-Cleft

This type does emphasize the object of the verb which is followed by the verb "be". We can form questions from "All-Cleft" sentences; however, negative sentences are not common in this type.

- All I want is respect.
- All they want is money and power.
- All Ryan wants for his birthday is a brand-new PS5.
- Wasn't all you wanted a red pickup?

There-Cleft

This type has a similar function to "It-cleft" sentences. They emphasize the existence of something.

- There is a book on the table that I need to read.
- There was a loud noise that woke everyone up.
- There is a reason why she is always late.
- There are many opportunities that you can explore.

As subjects, they have the dummy word "there" which is followed by the main verb "be", as well as some intransitive verbs.

WH-Cleft

Generally, WH-Cleft sentences (AKA Pseudo-Cleft) begin with "what"; however, we can use other WH words too. Usually, the WH-Clause contains "already-understood" information, while the following clause contains new information.

- What surprised everyone was his sudden resignation.
- What she loves doing on weekends is hiking in the mountains.
- What they couldn't understand was how he managed to solve the problem so quickly.
- What we need to focus on is improving our communication skills.
- What you should avoid at all costs is procrastination.
- Whom we need to consult for this issue is the project manager.
- How he managed to finish the project on time is beyond me.

- Whom I admire the most is my grandmother.

Be advised, new information does not come right after the Wh-word since it is indeed followed by the verb “be”.

Reversed “Wh-Cleft”

It is a type of “Wh-Cleft sentence” in which the “nominal relative clause” comes at the end of the sentence.

- A vacation is what I need right now.
- His sudden resignation is what surprised everyone.
- Hiking in the mountains is what she loves doing on weekends.
- How he managed to solve the problem so quickly is what they couldn't understand.
- Improving our communication skills is what we need to focus on.

This type is also known as “Inverted Pseudo-Cleft”.

If-Because Cleft

These sentences function similarly to inferential cleft sentences. By using the “if-because cleft” sentences, you can express the reason for an action.

- If we are late, it's because the traffic was terrible.
- If she didn't call, it's because she lost her phone.
- If they succeeded, it's because they worked very hard.
- If the meeting was canceled, it's because the boss is sick.

If-because cleft sentences are similar to conditional sentences; however, they are **NOT** conditional sentences.

Advanced Tip

1. Inferential Cleft Sentences
 - a. This is a type of “It-cleft” sentences that clarifies what others may wrongly assume. These sentences start with “it” followed by the verb “be”, and consist of two consecutive “it-that” sentences. The first sentence is negative, while the second sentence is affirmative and provides clarification. Adverbs such as “only” or “just” may be included in an inferential cleft sentence.
 - i. It's not that he's lazy; it's just that he's not motivated.
 - ii. It's not that she didn't want to come; it's that she was too busy.
 - iii. It's not that the movie was bad; it's that the plot was hard to follow.
 - iv. It's not just that the food was spicy; it's only that I have a sensitive stomach.
 - v. It's not only that she's late; it's just that she missed her bus.
2. Don't always say “It”.
 - a. We can use other pronouns such as “That” or “Those” instead of “it” in “It-Cleft” sentences.

- i. It was those books that inspired her to become a writer.
- ii. It was that movie that made me cry.
- iii. It was those friends that supported me through tough times.
- iv. It was that song that reminded me of my childhood.
- v. This movie is what I want to watch tonight.
- vi. These documents are what we need to review.

Examples

1. It was her father who taught her how to ride a bike.
2. It was the cold weather that delayed our flight.
3. It was their presentation that impressed the clients.
4. It was my grandmother who gave me this necklace.
5. It was the traffic that made us late for the party.
6. It's John who always arrives early for meetings.
7. It's her sister who usually helps her with homework.
8. It's the new restaurant that everyone is talking about.
9. It's the noise from the construction site that bothers me.
10. It's my dog that often wakes me up in the morning.
11. It's the weekends when I have time to relax.
12. It's the rain that makes driving difficult today.
13. It will be your hard work that determines your success.
14. It will be the weather that decides whether we go hiking or not.
15. It will be the results of the test that determine our next steps.
16. It will be my friend who accompanies me to the concert.
17. It will be the presentation we give next week that showcases our project.
18. It will be your determination that gets you through difficult times.
19. It will be the new technology that revolutionizes our industry.
20. It will be my savings that fund my trip to Europe next year.
21. It will be my parents who support me no matter what.
22. It should be your health that you prioritize above everything else.
23. It must have been your sister who borrowed my pen.
24. It could be the lack of sleep that's affecting your performance.
25. It might be his fear of heights that prevents him from climbing.
26. It would be your kindness that makes people admire you.
27. It ought to have been the instructions that were unclear.
28. It isn't his lack of skills that holds him back; it's his lack of confidence.
29. It wasn't her intention to offend anyone; it was just a misunderstanding.
30. It isn't the cost that concerns me; it's the quality of the product.

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93,000-member
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nimafar@englishwithnimafar.com

