

Grammar - Cleft Sentences

Intro: We can use cleft sentences to redirect emphasis of a word in a sentence.

1. It is Bob you should be mad at, not Joe.
2. It is the heat you need to worry about, not the rain.
3. It was Tim who got in trouble, not Mary.
4. It was the reading part I found hard, not the listening.

Point 1: We usually use cleft sentences to clarify a point held by another speaker.

- **Did you see the movie? I hear the acting was bad.**
- It wasn't the acting that was bad. It was the story.
- **I hear Tokyo is expensive because of high food costs.**
- It's not the food that is expensive. It's the rent.

Point 2: We can make cleft sentences by taking an object and moving it before the subject and verb:

It + is/was + object + (that/who) + original clause

- **You should be mad at Bob, not Joe.**
- It is Bob you should be mad at, not Joe.
- **We need to worry about the weather, not the traffic.**
- It's the weather we need to worry about, not the traffic.

Point 3: We can make cleft sentences by taking the subject and rearranging the words as follows:

It + is/was + subject + that/who + verb

- **Crime was an issue. Pollution was not an issue.**
- It was crime that was an issue, not pollution.
- **Mary doesn't annoy me. Matthew annoys me.**
- It isn't Mary who annoys me. It is Matthew who annoys me.

Point 4: In a cleft sentence, the subject is always 'it' and the pronoun precedes the word(s) it refers to. It can also be used in the past tense.

- **I was really mad at Tim and Sue.**
- It was Tim and Sue who I was mad at.
- **I found the math problems very hard, not the grammar ones.**
- It was the math problems that I found hard, not the grammar ones.

Point 4: By rearranging the words and starting the sentence with 'it', the speaker builds emphasis on the object and the contrasting element.

- I hear crime is a problem in the city.
- Crime is not the problem. Traffic is the problem.
- **It is not crime that is the problem. It's the traffic.**
- **It is the traffic that is the problem, not crime.**

Point 4: When contrasting two items, you can put them in either order.

Why do you hate your job? Is it the low pay?

- The salary is not the problem, the commute is.
- It's not the pay I dislike. It is the long commute.
- It is the commute I loathe, not the low pay.

Point 4: The words 'that' and 'who' can only be omitted if they refer to the object of a clause, not the subject.

1. It is Bob **that** we distrusted.
2. It is Bob **who** we distrusted.
3. It was Bob **who** made us mad.
4. It was the **weather** that caused the problem.

Cleft Sentences

Watch video using **cleft sentences** in four conversations.

Conversation 1 | [PDF Worksheet](#)

Man: I hear Joe caused quite a storm last night.

Woman: *It wasn't Joe who caused a ruckus.*

Man: Oh, really, who was it then?

Woman: *It was Bill who caused trouble.*

Man: Why does that not surprise me.

Woman: I know right. Shocker!

Conversation 2 | [PDF Worksheet](#)

Woman: How was your time in New York?

Man: Uh, I couldn't wait to leave.

Woman: Really? Was it too crowded for your taste?

Man: No, *it wasn't the crowds that I hated.*

Woman: Really, what was it.

Man: *It was the constant need to spend money that I didn't like.*

Woman: Yeah, the Big Apple is expensive for sure.

Conversation 3 | [PDF Worksheet](#)

Man: How was the movie?

Woman: Oh, it was a letdown. Not recommended.

Man: Really, did it have a bad plot?

Woman: No, *it wasn't the story that bothered me.*

Man: Then what did?

Woman: *It was the overuse of special effect that I didn't like.*

Man: Sounds like I should skip it.

Woman: Yeah, I'd give it a miss.

Conversation 4 | [PDF Worksheet](#)

Man: I hear we lost the contract. Did you we overbid?

Woman: No, *it wasn't the price that they disliked.*

Man: Really, what was it then?

Woman: *It was the strict time-frame they disapproved of.*

Man: Well, maybe we can counteroffer.

Woman: I doubt it. I think that ship has sailed.

Quiz

Answer these questions about the interview.

1) Who caused a ruckus?

a) Joe

b) Bill

2) What did the man dislike about New York?

a) The costs

b) The crowds

3) What was a letdown about the movie?

a) The plot

b) The special effects

Corporate Idioms

Put out fires

Meaning: To deal with emergencies rather than ordinary day-to-day tasks.

“I spent too much time putting out fires today with our servers that I didn’t even have a chance to send my new proposal.”

Cut corners

Meaning: To skip small but important steps.

“John’s team is making a lot of mistakes and it’s because they’re always cutting corners.”

“Whilst others may cut corners on small details, we insist on quality items.”

On a shoestring

Meaning: With very little money, with a small budget.

When I was younger, I traveled to Thailand on a shoestring.

“Surprisingly enough, the project was a success, even though we put it together on a shoestring.”

Cut to the chase

Meaning: Get to the point, stop wasting time with chit chat.

“I have to be somewhere in twenty minutes, so can you just cut to the chase?”

“I know everyone is super busy today, so shall we cut to the chase?”

Bend over backwards

Meaning: Go through a lot of trouble or discomfort to help someone out.

“She’s the kindest leader of all –you can see how she truly bends over backwards to keep everyone happy.”

“I bent over backwards to get her that job, and she is not even trying.”

A win-win situation

Meaning: A situation where every outcome is a good outcome.

“It will be a win-win situation for both foreign policy and the internal market.”

“Offering English training is a win-win situation -employees will gain confidence and the organization will get a high ROI.”