



# CLEFT SENTENCES

A **cleft sentence** is a sentence in which some part is moved from its normal position into a different place to give it more emphasis. Sometimes there's a particular part of a sentence that you really want to stress. It might be because it's new information or because it's the most interesting or important part of a sentence. One way of giving emphasis is by changing the structure of a sentence and using something called a **cleft sentence**.

## I. 'What' cleft sentences

You can use a 'what' cleft to draw attention to the most interesting or important part. Compare these sentences:

### Normal sentence structure

- *We got to our hotel and realised that our room had been double booked.*
- *They moved us to a different hotel.*
- *He offered us another week there for free.*

### With emphasis using 'what'

- *What happened was we got to the hotel and realised that our room had been double booked.*
- *What they did was move us to another hotel.*
- *What he did was offer us another week there for free.*

### 1. Structure - Emphasising the noun

**What + understood information + is/was + emphasis**

- *What I hated most was the insects everywhere.*

### 2. Structure - Emphasising the verb

**What/All + subject + do/does/did + is/was + verb**

- *What they did was move us to another town.*

### 3. Structure - Emphasising the whole sentence

**What happens/happened + is/was + clause**

- *What happened was we got to the hotel and realised that our room had been double booked.*

## ★ Cleft sentences with *what*

a Read what these people say about Lovely. Rewrite the comments.

1 I don't understand how anyone can just start their own country.

What I don't understand is how anyone can just start  
their own country.

2 Lovely has a bigger population than some 'real' countries.  
It's amazing.

What's \_\_\_\_\_

3 Wallace's visit to Death Row sounds weird.

What I find \_\_\_\_\_

4 The first thing I'd do with a new country is make myself president.

What I'd \_\_\_\_\_

5 He wasn't accepted into the United Nations. That's the disappointing thing.

What's \_\_\_\_\_

6 I think people should stop inventing new countries and concentrate on making things better in the real ones.

What I think \_\_\_\_\_

## II. 'It' cleft sentences

You can use an 'it' cleft to draw attention to the most interesting or important part. Compare these two sentences:

- *Rob ate my biscuits.*
- *It was Rob that ate my biscuits*

In the second sentence, we are focussing on the fact that Rob did this. It wasn't another person.

### Structure

**It + is/was + emphasis + (that) + rest of message**

- *It was Rob that/who ate my biscuits.* (not Catherine)
- *It was my biscuits that Rob ate.* (not my sandwiches)
- *It was yesterday that Rob ate my biscuits.* (not today)

We can also use this structure in the present tense:

- *It is me that/who does all the work.*

**b** Put the words in order to make replies.

1 A: So you're saying you don't believe the government.  
B: that / government / I'm / what / is / No / I / trust  
/ saying / the / don't

No, what I'm saying is that I don't trust the  
government.

2 A: Did Donna tell you?  
B: it / Jim / was / told / No / us / who

3 A: So you were confused by the film.  
B: film / what / of / confused / the / No / was /  
ending / the / me

4 A: And then she said some things that upset you?  
B: upset / was / No / didn't / me / things / the /  
what / she / say

5 A: Didn't Jim fail his driving test?  
B: No / failed / it / his / who / brother / was / it

6 A: Did you find the listening test difficult?  
B: I / what / exam / difficult / found / was / No /  
written / the

