

Unit 3: Cleft (Split/Divided) Sentences

0.0 General Information

- Divide a sentence (or clause) into two sections to highlight a specific part of it.
- It is useful in written English to replace where the intonation is used to highlight spoken English.
- It emphasises that the focus of the sentence is important and that no other options are valid.

1.0 “It” type

- This is the most common type of cleft sentence

Form: it + “to be” + key idea

Compare the following examples:

Spoken version: “John put up a sign last night to warn people not to smoke in the cafe.”

1. It was **John** who put up a sign last night to warn people not to smoke in the cafe.
2. It was a **sign** that John put up last night to warn people not to smoke in the cafe.
3. It was **last night** that John put up a sign to warn people not to smoke in the cafe.
4. It was **to warn people not to smoke in the cafe** that John put up a sign last night.

The part of the sentence in **RED** is highlighted or focused upon in each example.

- The “focus” of the cleft sentence is often introduced with a modal verb

Form: it + modal verb + “to be” + key idea

Using the same example:

1. It **must** have been **John** who put up a sign last night to warn people not to smoke in the cafe.
2. It **may** be a **sign** that John put up last night to warn people not to smoke in the cafe.
3. It **had to** have been **last night** that John put up a sign to warn people not to smoke in the cafe.
4. It **might** be **to warn people not to smoke in the cafe** that John put up a sign last night.

2.0 “What” clause as a subject

- This focuses attention on the part of the cleft sentence that follows it.

Compare the following examples:

- Standard structure: You need a holiday.
- Cleft Sentence: What you need is **a holiday.**

- Standard structure: I’m going to visit Pereira tomorrow.
- Cleft Sentence: What I’m going to do is **(to) visit Pereira tomorrow.**

- Standard structure: The teacher focused on listening skills today.
- Cleft Sentence: What the teacher did was **(to) focus on listening skills today.**