

WH-WORD CLAUSES

GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE SENTENCES

1. Print this file and place the answer pages to the side.
2. Cover the answer pages with a sheet of paper, and slide the paper down as you complete each practice sentence.
3. Use colored markers and a highlighter to work on each practice sentence.

Feel free to write to me (dr_ron@grammar-once-and-for-all.com) if you have any questions or problems.

Directions:

1. Mark the structural backbones of all clauses, both main clauses and subordinate (dependent) clauses:

Color just the main word of subjects of finite verbs **blue**.

Color auxiliary verbs and main verbs **red**.

Color just the main word of completers of finite verbs **green**.

2. Mark subordinate clauses by enclosing them in curly brackets: { }. If the dependent clause is a **subject** or **completer** of a main clause, color the brackets appropriately: { } or { }. If the subordinate clause functions as a modifier, indicate what it modifies.

3. Enclose prepositional phrases in parentheses: () and indicate what each modifies.

4. In the answers, I've marked nested clauses and phrases, but it's not necessary to do so.

We are not **concerned** (with {**what Fang does** (on his days off) }).

[*On his days off* modifies *does*. The *WH*-word clause *what Fang does on his days off* is the completer of the preposition *with*. The entire prepositional phrase *with what Fang does on his days off* modifies *concerned*.]

Won't you tell me {how **you made** such a delicious cobra-chow **casserole**}?

[*Won't tell* takes double completers: *me* and the *WH*-word clause *how you made such a delicious cobra chow*. *How* modifies *made*.]

Just **imagine** {what **fun we'll have** {when **we meet** the **Piranha Brothers**} }..

[The “when” clause modifies *will have*. The *WH*-word clause beginning with *what fun* is the completer of *can imagine*. *What* modifies *fun*.]

The **problem** (of {how many **Yuppies can dance** (on the hood (of a BMW)) }) **is** not **one** {**that bothers** automobile **designers** a whole lot}.

[The structural backbone of the sentence is **problem is one**. Working backwards from the end of the sentence: *a whole lot* is an adverb phrase modifying *bothers*. The *WH*-word clause *that bothers automobile designers a whole lot* modifies *one*. *One* is a pronoun; its antecedent is *problem*.

Of a BMW modifies *hood*. *On the hood of a BMW* modifies *can dance*. The *WH*-word clause *how many Yuppies can dance on the hood of a BMW* is the completer of the first preposition, *of*, in the sentence. The entire prepositional phrase: *of how many Yuppies can dance on the hood of a BMW* modifies *problem*.]

Miss Hiss has a **job** (as a consultant (in The Heartburn Cafe, {where **she's part** (of a team {**that revives customers** }) }))

[Reading backwards from the end of the sentence: the *WH*-word clause *that advises customers* modifies *team*. (*That* is a pronoun whose antecedent is *team*.) The prepositional phrase *of a team that advises customers* modifies *part*. The *WH*-word clause beginning *where she's part of a team* modifies *Heartburn Cafe*. *In the Heartburn Cafe* modifies *consultant*, and *as a consultant* modifies *job*.]

WH-word Clauses: Practice Sentences 1 - 5

1. Simple Simon met the pie man who had hidden a mouse trap in Jack Horner's pie.

2. I hear the Fangs are throwing the kind of pit party that absolutely guarantees humungous hangovers.

3. The time I like the pit the most is the time Fang spends out of it.

4. The fleas that were scratched from the chorus line insist they won't give back the ballet shoes they were issued.

5. What Dr. Writhe meant was that venom can also be a health product when it's used sparingly.

WH-word Clauses: Practice Sentences 6 - 8

6. Provided you get the kind that has a sense of humor, an electric toad is exactly what you need.

7. Many autobiographers, among them Lincoln Steffens and Gertrude Atherton, describe earthquakes their families have been in.

8. I am unable to do this because my family was never in an earthquake, but we went through a number of things in Columbus that were a great deal like earthquakes.

WH-word Clauses: Practice Sentences 9 - 12

9. I remember in particular some of the repercussions of an old Reo we had that wouldn't go unless you pushed it for quite a way and suddenly let your clutch out.

10. Most of what New Yorkers hear on the street they wish they didn't have to.

11. The movie *Jurassic Park* is just another creature feature on amphetamines, and its natural audience—as usual for Hollywood blockbusters—is people who have never seen a movie or people who want the same story again and again.

12. Communism, though embattled pockets of it still exist and the social problems it hoped to rectify are still globally present, has quickly become something we'd rather not think about.

WH-word Clauses: Answers to sentences 1 - 5

1. **Simple Simon met** the **pie man** {**who had hidden** a mouse **trap** (in Jack Horner's pie) }.

[*In Jack Horner's pie* modifies *had hidden*. The *WH*-word clause beginning *who had hidden* modifies *pie man*.]

2. **We hear** {the **Fangs are throwing** the **kind** (of pit party) {**that** absolutely **guarantees** humungous **hangovers**}. }

[The *WH*-clause *that absolutely guarantees humungous hangovers* modifies *kind*. *Of pit party* also modifies *kind*. In the clause that begins *the Fangs are throwing* (the completer of *hear*), the subordinating-connective *that* has been ellipited.]

3. The **time** {**I like** the **pit** the most} **is** the **time** {**Fang spends** (out of it).}

[The structural backbone of the sentence is *time...is...time*. *I like the pit the most* is a *WH*-word clause that modifies the subject. A relative adverb (*when*) has been ellipited. *Fang spends out of it* is a *WH*-word clause that modifies the completer. A relative pronoun (*that*) has been ellipited.]

(Note: All *WH*-word relative *adverbs* may be ellipited: for instance, the reason I left = the reason why I left; the place I fell = the place where I fell.)

4. The **fleas** {**who were scratched** (from the chorus line) } **insist** {**they won't give** back the ballet **shoes** {**they were issued**}. }

[*From the chorus line* modifies *scratched*. *Who were scratched from the chorus line* modifies *fleas*. *They won't give back the ballet shoes they were issued* is a noun clause, the completer of *insist* (the subordinating connective *that* has been ellipited.) *They were issued* is a *WH*-word clause modifying *shoes*: a *WH*-word, *that* or *which*, has been ellipited.]

5. {**What Dr. Writhe meant**} **was** {that **venom can** also **be** a health **product** {when **it's used** sparingly}. }

[A *WH*-word clause is the subject of *was* and a subordinating-connective clause is its completer. *When it's used sparingly* is an adverb clause modifying *can be*.]

WH-word Clauses: Answers to sentences 6 - 8

6. {Provided **you get** the **kind** {**that has** a **sense** (of humor) } }, an electric **toad is** exactly {**what you need**}. [The structural, backbone is **toad is**...{what you need}. *Of humor* modifies *sense*. *That has a sense of humor* is a WH-word adjective clause modifying *kind*. *Provided you get the kind that has a sense of humor* is a subordinating-connective clause modifying *is*, the finite verb in the main clause. *Is* takes as a completer the WH-word clause *what you need*.]

[Sentences 7-9 are three consecutive sentences from, *My Life and Hard Times*, by James Thurber (Bantam Books, 1961), p. 27]

7. Many **autobiographers**, among them Lincoln Steffens and Gertrude Atherton, **describe earthquakes** {their **families have been** in}.

[*Among them Lincoln Steffens and Gertrude Atherton* is a clause with an ellipped finite verb: *Lincoln Steffens and Gertrude Atherton [are] among them*. It's called a *parenthetical* clause since it lightly interrupts the clause in which it's inserted. Parenthetical clauses are discussed in the Punctuation Section of this site.

Their families have been in modifies *earthquakes*. It's a WH-word clause with an ellipped pronoun (*which*): *we could also say in which their families have been*. *The ellipting* of the WH-word sends the preposition to the end of the clause.]

8. **I am unable** [to do this] {because my **family was** never (in an earthquake) }, but **we went** (through a number (of things (in Columbus) {**that were** (a great deal like earthquakes) }))

[Two coordinate independent clauses connected by *but*. The phrase in square brackets in the first independent clause, *to do this*, is a *non-finite verb phrase* that modifies *unable* (non-finite verb phrases are the subject of the following page: this one has popped in a bit early.). *Because my family was never in an earthquake* modifies *unable*. *In an earthquake* modifies *was*.

Reading backwards from the end of the second independent clause: *a great deal like earthquakes* modifies *were*. *A great deal* is an adverb phrase that modifies the preposition *like*. *That were a great deal like earthquakes* modifies *things*, and so does *in Columbus*. The entire prepositional phrase, *through a number of things that were a great deal like earthquakes* modifies *went*.]

WH-word Clauses: Answers to sentences 9 - 12

9. **I remember** (in particular) **some** (of the repercussions (of an old Reo {**we had**} {**that wouldn't go** {unless **you pushed it** (for quite a way) and suddenly **let your clutch out**}.})).

[The structural backbone of the main clause is **I remember some**. *In particular* modifies *remember*. *Of the repercussions* modifies *some*. *Of an old Reo* modifies *repercussions* (a Reo was an early automobile). *Reo* is modified by two WH-word adjective clauses: [*that*] *we had* and *that wouldn't go*. The "unless" clause modifies *wouldn't go*. *For quite a while* modifies *pushed*.]

(Sentences 11-13 are from *The New Yorker* of June 28, 1993. (Vol. LXIX, No. 19).]

10. **Most** (of {**what New Yorkers hear** (on the street) }) **they wish** {**they didn't have to**}.

[Sentence 10 comes from an anonymous feature called "The Talk of the Town." The word order has deliberately been made somewhat awkward, as though in imitation of the discomfort New Yorkers feel. If we rearrange the elements and restore the ellipsed words, the structure will be much easier to see: *New Yorkers wish [that] they didn't have to [hear] most of what they hear on the street*. *Have to* is a modal auxiliary verb.]

11. **Jurassic Park is** just another creature **feature** (on amphetamines), and its natural **audience**—(as usual (for Hollywood blockbusters))—**is people** {**who have** never **seen a movie**} or **people** {**who want** the same **story** again and again}.

[Sentence 11 is slightly altered from Terrence Rafferty, "The Current Cinema," p. 96. In the first independent clause, *on amphetamines* modifies *feature* (A "creature feature" is a monster movie.)

The structural backbone of the second independent clause is **audience is people** or **people** (coordinate completers). The two completers can be the same noun because each is separately modified by the WH-word adjective clause that follows it. *As [is] usual for Hollywood blockbusters* modifies *is*.]

12. **Communism**, {though embattled **pockets** (of it) still **exist** and the social **problems** {**it hoped to rectify**} **are** still globally **present**}, **has** quickly **become something** {**we'd** rather not **think** about}.

[John Updike, "Books," p. 99. The structural backbone of the sentence is **Communism has become something**. The subordinating-connective *though* serves two concessive clauses: *though embattled pockets of it still exist* and [*though*] *the social problems it hoped to rectify are still globally present*. Both clauses modify *has become*. *It hoped to rectify* is a WH-word adjective clause modifying *problems*. *We'd rather not think about* is a WH-word adjective clause modifying *something*. In both clauses, the WH-word (*which* or *that*) has been ellipsed.