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 \( \{ \text{with } \{ \text{what Fang does on his days off} \} \} \).

[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.]

\[
\text{Won't you tell me } \{ \text{how you made such a delicious cobra-chow casserole} \} ?
\]

[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 \( \{ \text{what fun we’ll have when we meet the Piranha Brothers} \} \)...

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

[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 \( \{ \text{as a consultant in The Heartburn Cafe, where she’s part of a team that revives customers} \} \).

[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 ellipted.]

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 ellipted. Fang spends out of it is a WH-word clause that modifies the completer. A relative pronoun (that) has been ellipted.]

   (Note: All WH-word relative adverbs may be ellipted: 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 ellipted.) They were issued is a WH-word clause modifying shoes: a WH-word, that or which, has been ellipted.]

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

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

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

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

\textit{Their families have been in} modifies earthquakes. It’s a WH-word clause with an ellipted pronoun \textit{(which)}: \textit{we could also say in which their families have been}. \textit{The ellipling} of the WH-word sends the preposition to the end of the clause.]

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

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

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