

WC

# What Changed Everything

Tiny moments that redirected careers and the cleft sentences behind them

B2

Reading

Grammar

40 min

## ★ Lesson Objectives

- ★ Read an article about small moments that changed lives
- ★ Learn vocabulary related to career, identity and turning points
- ★ Use cleft sentences: It was...that/who, What...is/was, The reason...is/was
- ★ Understand how speakers restructure sentences for emphasis
- ★ Discuss pivotal moments in your own life
- ★ Write about a defining moment using cleft sentences

## 1 Before You Read

- ▶ Has a single moment ever completely changed the direction of your life?
- ▶ Is success about hard work, talent, or luck?
- ▶ What do you think was the biggest turning point for someone you admire?

## 2 Reading: The Butterfly Moments

*We like to think of success as a straight line. But ask anyone who has achieved something remarkable, and they will point to a single, unexpected moment that changed everything.*

Journalist Marta Kowalski calls them "butterfly moments" — small, accidental events that set off unpredictable chains of consequences. Her book *The Smallest Push* collects forty such stories.

*It was a delayed train that changed Adrien Moreau's life.* The Lyon accountant missed his connection and walked into a tiny ceramics gallery. Something captivated him. He signed up for a weekend course that evening. Within two years he had quit accounting and opened a studio. *"The thing that surprises people is that I had no artistic background. What drew me in was the physicality — wet clay in my hands. It wasn't talent. It was curiosity."*

*What changed everything for Priya Sharma was a rejection letter.* Her fledgling health-tech startup was rejected by a prestigious accelerator. *"The reason I didn't get in was that my pitch was too technical."* The feedback stung, but she spent six months learning storytelling and design thinking, was accepted the following year, and now runs a company with 300 employees in eleven countries. *"It was that rejection, not any success, that made me the leader I am today."*

*It was a stranger's comment that pushed Tomasz Baranski to write.* The Krakow teacher had written stories in his spare time but never shown them. A woman in a cafe said: "Your focus is extraordinary. Whatever that is, it must be important." *What that comment did was* give him permission to take his writing seriously. His novel became a Polish bestseller. *"The thing I had always lacked was not skill — it was confidence. All it took was* one person noticing."

*What made Fatima Al-Rashid leave medicine was a child's question.* The Amman paediatrician was exhausted when a ten-year-old asked: "Why are the walls always grey?" That question haunted her. She founded a non-profit redesigning children's hospital wards. *The reason I left wasn't that I stopped caring — it was that I found a bigger way to care.* Her organisation has transformed 200+ wards; children recover 15% faster.

Kowalski's conclusion: *"What all butterfly moments have in common is that they are unplanned. It is not the moment itself that matters — it is what you do with it."* The moment that changes your life might already have happened. You just haven't recognised it yet.

### 3 Vocabulary

Word	Definition	Example
<b>altered</b>	changed	<i>A moment altered her career.</i>
<b>accidental</b>	by chance	<i>Completely accidental.</i>
<b>set off</b>	cause to begin	<i>Set off a chain reaction.</i>
<b>compelling</b>	interesting, convincing	<i>A compelling story.</i>
<b>captivated</b>	held attention completely	<i>Colours captivated him.</i>
<b>physicality</b>	physical quality	<i>Loved the physicality.</i>
<b>fledgling</b>	new, inexperienced	<i>A fledgling startup.</i>
<b>pitch</b>	persuasive presentation	<i>Pitch was too technical.</i>
<b>stung</b>	hurt emotionally	<i>Criticism stung.</i>
<b>rethink</b>	think again, change approach	<i>Forced to rethink.</i>
<b>spare</b>	free, extra	<i>In his spare time.</i>
<b>extraordinary</b>	very remarkable	<i>Focus is extraordinary.</i>

Word	Definition	Example
<b>permission</b>	right to do something	<i>Gave himself permission.</i>
<b>paediatrician</b>	children's doctor	<i>Worked as paediatrician.</i>
<b>haunted</b>	stayed in mind, troubled	<i>The question haunted her.</i>
<b>reassuring</b>	makes you feel less worried	<i>A reassuring message.</i>

**Collocations:** turning point • chain reaction • career change • by chance • take seriously • change the course of • give permission • make a difference

## 4 Grammar: Cleft Sentences

### ■ In the Text, You Saw...

- It-cleft: "It was a delayed train that changed his life."
- Wh-cleft: "What changed everything for Priya was a rejection."
- Reason-cleft: "The reason I didn't get in was that my pitch was too technical."
- Thing-cleft: "The thing I lacked was confidence."
- All-cleft: "All it took was one person noticing."

A cleft sentence splits a simple sentence into two parts to emphasise one element. 'Cleft' means 'divided.'

Type	Structure	Emphasises	Example
<b>It-cleft</b>	It was/is + focus + that/who	person/thing/time	It was John who broke it.
<b>Wh-cleft</b>	What + clause + is/was	action/thing	What I need is a holiday.
<b>Reason</b>	The reason + clause + is/was	cause	The reason I left was the salary.
<b>Thing</b>	The thing + clause + is/was	specific element	The thing I love is freedom.
<b>All</b>	All + clause + is/was	simplicity	All I want is peace.

### NORMAL → CLEFT TRANSFORMATION

- Normal: "A delayed train changed his life."
- It-cleft: "It was a delayed train that changed his life."
- Wh-cleft: "What changed his life was a delayed train."
- All-cleft: "All it took was a delayed train."

### ★ When to Use Cleft Sentences

1. Storytelling — dramatic effect.
2. Correcting — 'It wasn't X, it was Y.'
3. Emphasising — highlight what matters.
4. Formal writing.

### ▲ Common Mistakes

- ✗ "It was him which..." → ✓ "It was him who..." (who for people)
- ✗ "What I need it is..." → ✓ "What I need is..." (no extra it)
- ✗ "It was yesterday who..." → ✓ "It was yesterday that..." (that for time)

## 5 Game: Rewrite as Cleft

1. A rejection changed Priya's career. [It-cleft]  
→ It was a rejection that changed Priya's career.
2. She needed more confidence. [Wh-cleft]  
→ What she needed was more confidence.
3. He quit because he hated accounting. [Reason]  
→ The reason he quit was that he hated accounting.
4. A stranger's comment pushed him. [It-cleft]  
→ It was a stranger's comment that pushed him.
5. She needed time, not money. [Wh-cleft]  
→ What she needed was time, not money.
6. He loved the physicality. [Thing-cleft]  
→ The thing he loved was the physicality.
7. One person noticing was enough. [All-cleft]  
→ All it took was one person noticing.
8. The boy's question changed her. [It-cleft]  
→ It was the boy's question that changed her.
9. She left because she found a bigger way. [Reason]  
→ The reason she left was that she found a bigger way to care.
10. He needed permission. [Wh-cleft]  
→ What he needed was permission.

## 6 Comprehension Quiz

1. What does Kowalski call life-changing moments?

Answer: Butterfly moments

2. What was Adrien doing before ceramics?

Answer: Working as an accountant

3. What did rejection teach Priya?

Answer: That storytelling and communication matter

4. What did the boy ask Fatima?

Answer: Why the walls were always grey

5. '\_\_\_ a train \_\_\_ changed his life.' Cleft type?

Answer: It was...that (It-cleft)

6. '\_\_\_ she needed \_\_\_ more time.' Cleft type?

Answer: What...was (Wh-cleft)

7. Which word for people in it-clefts?

Answer: who

8. Which cleft emphasises simplicity?

Answer: All...was (All-cleft)

## 7 Fill in the Blanks

1. \_\_\_ a stranger's comment \_\_\_ gave him courage. [It-cleft]
2. \_\_\_ she really wanted \_\_\_ a fresh start. [Wh-cleft]
3. \_\_\_ he moved \_\_\_ the high cost of London. [Reason]
4. \_\_\_ I love about this city \_\_\_ the energy. [Thing]
5. \_\_\_ she needed \_\_\_ one chance. [All-cleft]
6. \_\_\_ my mother \_\_\_ taught me hard work. [It-cleft]
7. \_\_\_ changed my mind \_\_\_ seeing the data. [Wh-cleft]
8. \_\_\_ I chose this job \_\_\_ the flexibility. [Reason]

● **Answers:** 1. It was ... that • 2. What ... was • 3. The reason ... was • 4. The thing ... is • 5. All ... was • 6. It was ... who • 7. What ... was • 8. The reason ... was

## 8 Speaking & Writing

### ◆ Discussion Questions

1. Which story inspired you most? 'The story that inspired me was...'
2. What is the most important quality for success?
3. Have you experienced a 'butterfly moment'? What was it that happened?
4. What I think about failure is...
5. The thing most people don't understand about success is...

### ◆ Example Dialogue

A: What made you choose this career?

B: It was my grandmother who inspired me. What I admired was how she changed lives.

A: The reason I became a journalist was that I wanted to tell stories.

B: It was a trip to a refugee camp that changed everything for me.

A: All it takes sometimes is one experience to redirect your life.

### ◆ Writing Task

Write 100-150 words about a moment that changed something important:

- At least 2 it-cleft: 'It was... that/who...'
- At least 2 wh-cleft: 'What... is/was...'
- At least 1 reason-cleft: 'The reason... was that...'

Total: at least 5 cleft sentences.

## 9 Review Checklist

### I can now...

- ✓ understand a long article about life-changing moments
- ✓ use vocabulary related to career, identity and turning points
- ✓ form it-cleft sentences: It was/is... that/who
- ✓ form wh-cleft sentences: What... is/was
- ✓ form reason-cleft, thing-cleft and all-cleft sentences
- ✓ write about defining moments using cleft sentences



## Congratulations!

You have completed Lesson 18: What Changed Everything.