

Intermediate English Grammar

Chapter 9

Introductory It & Ellipsis

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Introductory It

“It” is often used when a sentence has no clear subject, and is sometimes known as a dummy subject or empty subject.

“IT” AS A DUMMY SUBJECT

“It” is used to talk about the time, dates, distance, or the weather. In these sentences, “it” doesn’t have a specific meaning, but it serves as the grammatical subject of the sentence.

“IT” AS A DUMMY SUBJECT

“It” can be used to talk about the time.



“It” can be used to talk about distances.



“IT” AS A DUMMY SUBJECT

“It” can be used to talk about the day, date, month, or year.



“It” can be used to talk about the weather.

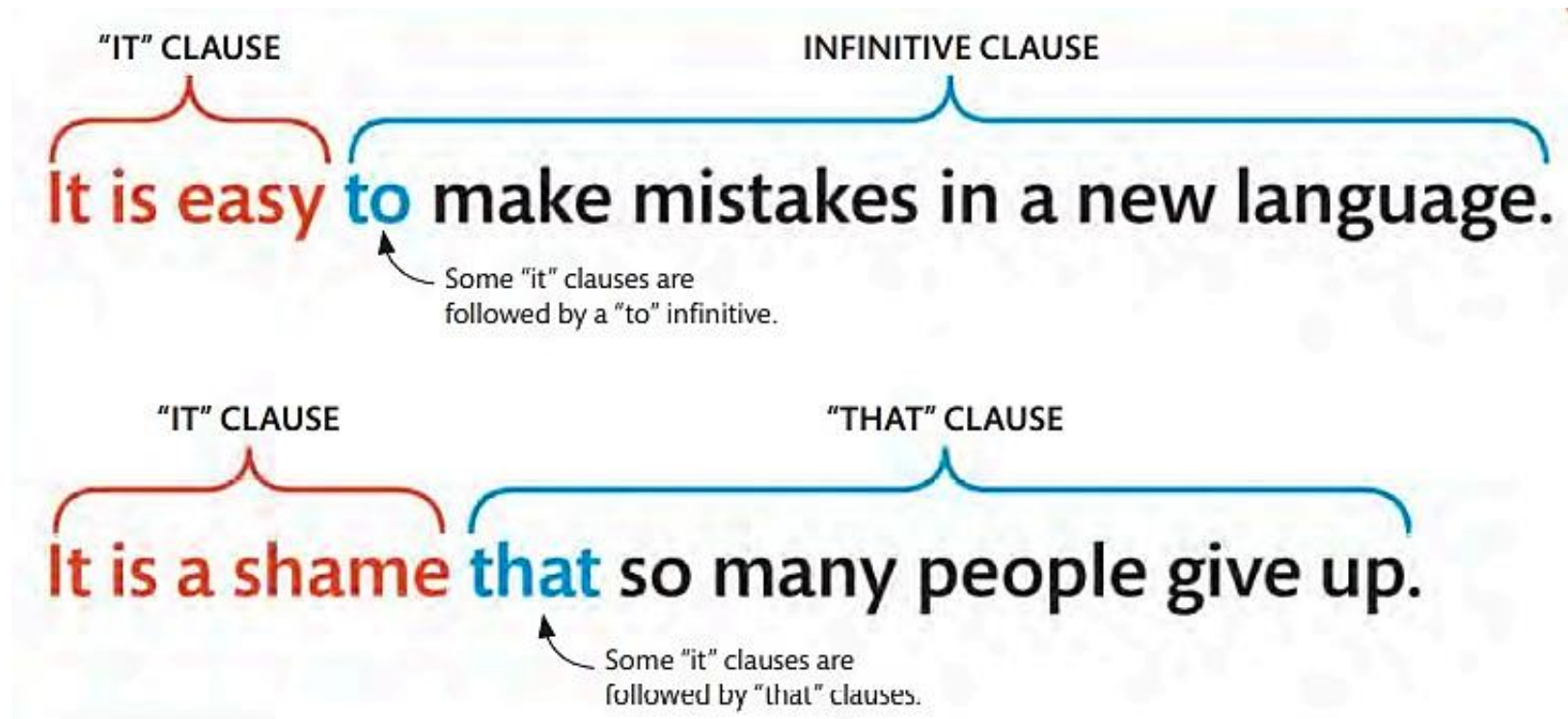


FURTHER EXAMPLES

- It is 2 o'clock in the morning. Please stop singing.
- I am going to walk to work. It is only two miles away.
- It is the 21st century. I can't believe you still use that phone.
- I am surprised that it is so sunny in the middle of January.

INTRODUCTORY "IT"

Certain set phrases beginning "it is" can be used at the start of a sentence. "It" is the subject of the sentence, and can be used to express a general truth or belief.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

- It is important to be relaxed about making mistakes.
- It is unlikely that you will be comfortable speaking aloud at first.
- It is essential to give yourself time to study regularly.
- It is true that being able to speak a second language is useful.
- It is difficult to remember facts if you don't write them down.
- It is often said that going to the country of the language helps.

Exercise

Rewrite the following sentences using 'introductory it'.

1. To become a millionaire was his life-long ambition.
2. To withdraw now will be sheer folly.
3. To learn English is easy.
4. To understand his motive was difficult.
5. To drive so fast could be dangerous.
6. To get such an offer must be tempting.
7. To consult specialists must be advisable.
8. To accept your advice is difficult.

Exercise

(answer)

1. It was his life-long ambition to become a millionaire.
2. It will be sheer folly to withdraw now.
3. It is easy to learn English.
4. It was difficult to understand his motive.
5. It could be dangerous to drive so fast.
6. It must be tempting to get such an offer.
7. It must be advisable to consult specialists.
8. It is difficult to accept advice.

Ellipsis

Some words can be left out of a sentence to avoid repetition, or when the meaning can be understood without them. This is called ellipsis.

ELLIPSIS AFTER CONJUNCTIONS

When two phrases are joined by “and,” “but,” or “or” it is common to leave out repeated words of various kinds.

He bought tickets, **but** [he] didn't go.

Often a repeated subject is dropped after “and,” “but,” or “or.”

She loved the original **and** [she loved] the sequel.

If the meaning remains clear, a repeated subject and verb can be dropped.

I'm happy to go out **or** [I'm happy to] stay home.

If the meaning is clear, words that have already been mentioned and do not require repetition can be omitted.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

- She said she'd call, but she didn't [call].
- I hope my camera works, but I don't think it will [work].
- You can watch the documentary or [you can watch] the cartoon.
- Please may I have a knife and [a] fork?
- I'd love to be a boxer, but I'm not strong enough [to be a boxer].
- I can't decide if I want a burger or [I want] a hotdog.

CONVERSATIONAL ELLIPSIS

Words can also be left out of sentences if the meaning can be understood from the context. This kind of ellipsis does not have strict rules, and is very common in informal everyday speech, particularly when giving replies.



CONVERSATIONAL ELLIPSIS

What kind of popcorn
would you like?



Salted, please.

[I would like salted
popcorn, please.]

What did you
think of the film?



Complete nonsense.

[I thought the film was
complete nonsense.]

QUESTION WORD CLAUSES

Clauses can be dropped after question words such as “who,” “what,” “where,” and “how.”

- Somebody stole my watch, but I don't know **who** [stole it].
- I want to buy my dad a present, but I'm not sure **what** [to buy him].
- I want to go away, but I can't decide **where** [to go].
- I need to fix my car, and I'm fairly certain I know **how** [to fix it].

Exercise

Complete the sentences with the correct answers.

1. Harry did his homework, even though he
2. She said she could use a computer but it was obvious that she
3. We can't repair your car today but tomorrow.
4. You don't work as hard as
5. I don't know if I'll pass all my exams but I
6. Although I could have gone to university, I
7. Simon broke his brother's computer but he didn't
8. She should get a job but she

Exercise

(answer)

1. Harry did his homework, even though he didn't want to.
2. She said she could use a computer but it was obvious that she couldn't.
3. We can't repair your car today but we can tomorrow.
4. You don't work as hard as you should.
5. I don't know if I'll pass all my exams but I hope to.
6. Although I could have gone to university, I didn't.
7. Simon broke his brother's computer but he didn't mean to.
8. She should get a job but she won't.

Thank you!

REFERENCES

Murphy, Raymond & Smalzer, William. *Grammar in use, Intermediate*. Cambridge U. Press, 2019.

DK. *English for Everyone – English Grammar Guide*. Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2016.