

Cleft Sentences

Adding emphasis
in English



Why use cleft sentences?

- **They are a great way to emphasise the most important part of your message in English:**

*e.g. The teacher explained the rules clearly.
(normal sentence)*

e.g. What the teacher did was explain the rules clearly. (cleft sentence)



What does the term ‘cleft sentences’ mean?

- They’re called cleft sentences because the word cleft means “split” or “divided”.
- In a cleft sentence, the information from a normal sentence is split into two parts in order to give one part special emphasis.

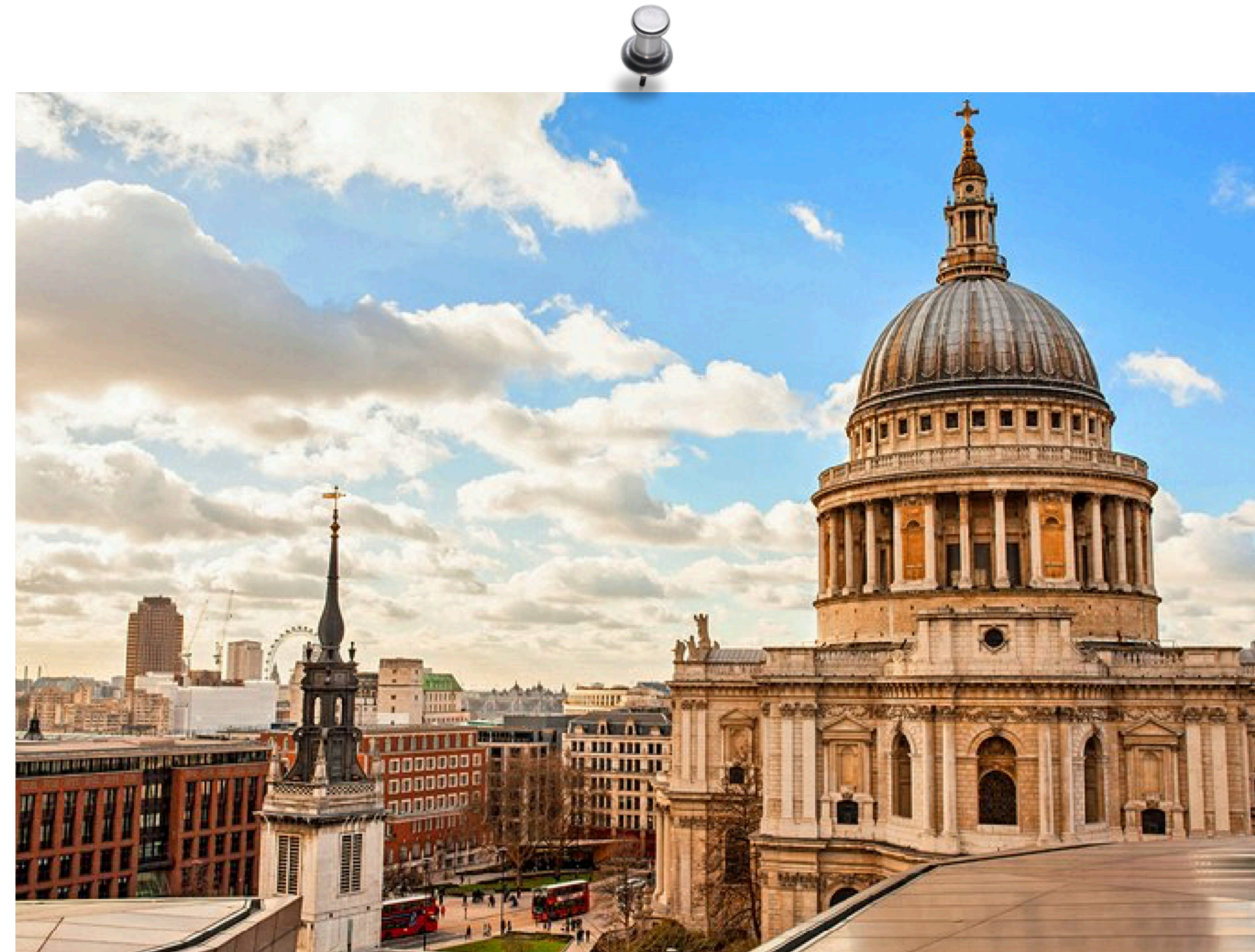
Normal: *Tom bought the tickets yesterday.*

Cleft: *What Tom did was buy the tickets yesterday.*

Here, the original idea (Tom bought the tickets yesterday) is split (cleft) into:

What Tom did → *the cleft clause*

was buy the tickets yesterday → *the emphasised part*



What is the structure of cleft sentences?

- **What + subject + verb + be + emphasised information**

e.g. She wants more practice. (normal sentence)

e.g. What she wants is more practice. (cleft sentence)

e.g. We enjoy playing together as a team. (normal sentence)

e.g. What we enjoy is playing together as a team. (cleft sentence)



Cleft sentences emphasising the object

e.g. He broke the window. (normal sentence)

e.g. What he broke was the window. (cleft sentence)

e.g. I'll bring the dessert to the party. (normal sentence)

e.g. What I'll bring is the dessert. (cleft sentence)

e.g. They painted the walls. (normal sentence)

e.g. What they painted was the walls. (cleft sentence)



Cleft sentences emphasising the whole action with “do”

e.g. *I'll bring the dessert. (normal sentence)*

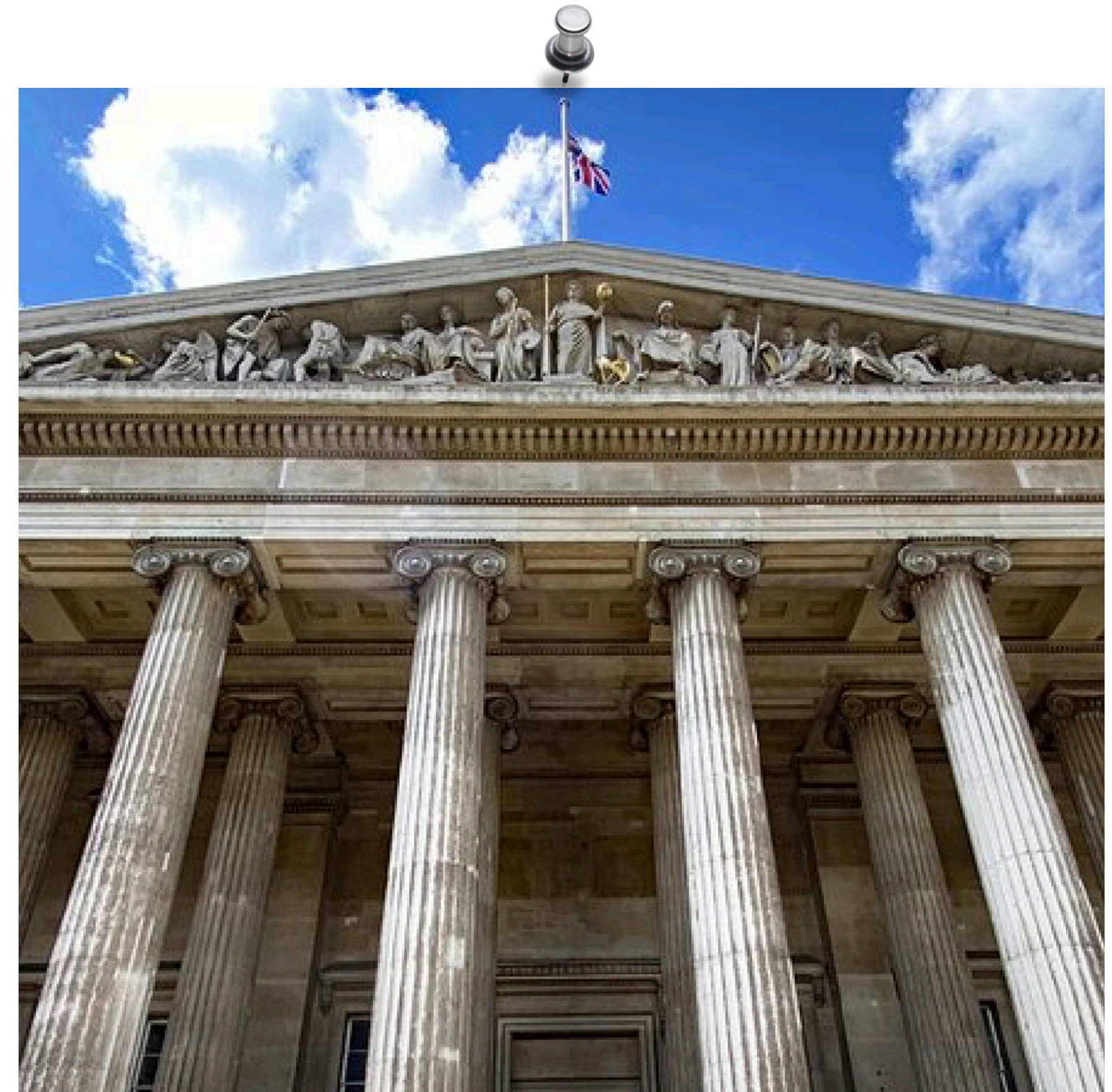
e.g. *What I'll **do** is bring the dessert. (cleft sentence)*

e.g. *They painted the walls. (normal sentence)*

e.g. *What they **did** was paint the walls. (cleft sentence)*

e.g. *He broke the window. (normal sentence)*

e.g. *What he **did** was break the window. (cleft sentence)*



Cleft sentences
emphasising the whole action with “do”

Remember, the auxiliary do must match the tense of the original sentence.

Past: *She cleaned the kitchen yesterday.*
➔ *What she did was clean the kitchen yesterday.*

Future: *We'll call the manager later.*
➔ *What we'll do is call the manager later.*



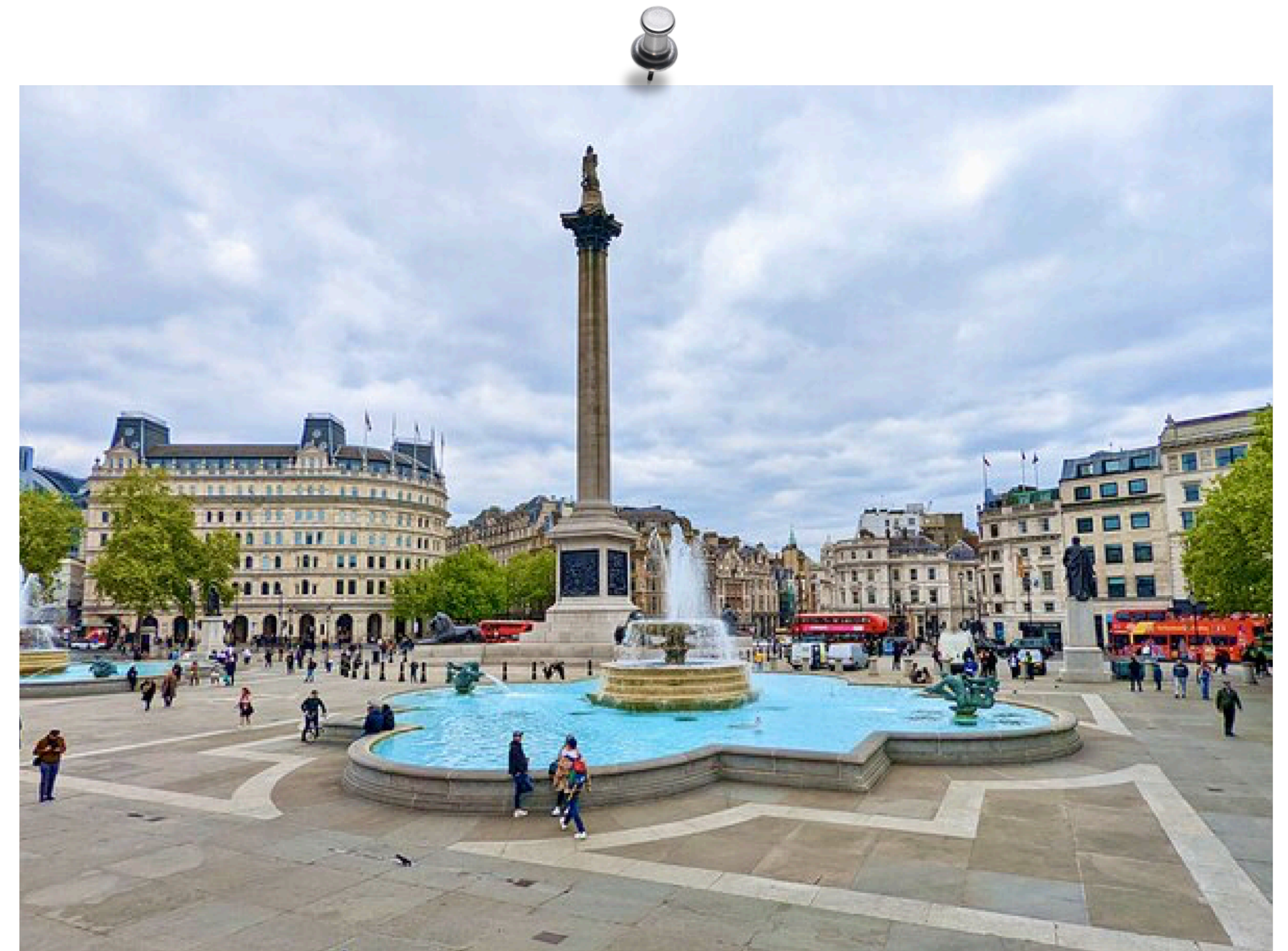
Cleft sentences with Feelings and States – No “do”!

**Important rule:
don't use “do” with feelings or states.**

*I like pizza. ➔ What I **like** is pizza.*

*She owns three dogs. ➔ What she owns is
three dogs.*

**Remember: “do” is for actions, not for
feelings or states.**



Continuous Actions

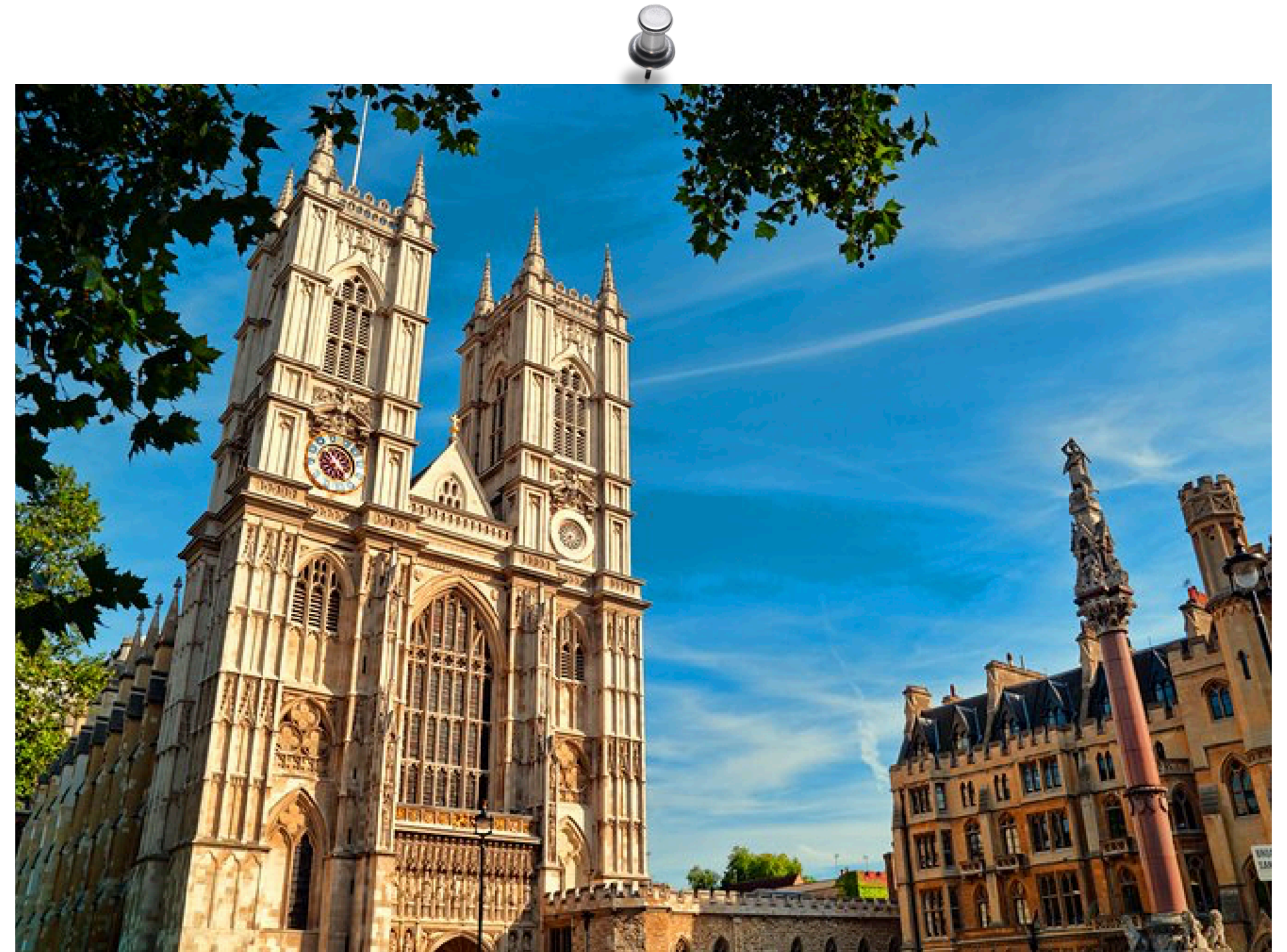
If the verb is continuous, we keep that form in the cleft sentence.

They are waiting for the bus.

➔ *What they are doing is waiting for the bus.*

He was reading in the library.

➔ *What he was doing was reading in the library.*



Cleft Sentences

Let's quickly review:

- Use cleft sentences to emphasise information.
- Structure: What + subject + verb + be + info.
- Use do for actions if you want to highlight the whole verb phrase.
- Match the tense of the original sentence.
- Don't use do with states or feelings.

