

Verb + **wh**-clause

A Some verbs can be followed by a clause beginning with a **wh**-word (**how, what, when, where, which, who, or why**):

- That might **explain** *why* he's unhappy.
- I couldn't **decide** *which* train to catch.
- Let's **consider** *how* we can solve the problem.

Many of these verbs can also be followed by –

☆ a **that**-clause (see Unit 33):

- I **decided** *that* I ought to leave.

☆ a **wh**-clause (except 'why') + **to**-infinitive:

- Did** you **find out** *where* to go?

Note that if we add a subject in the **wh**-clause we don't use a **to**-infinitive:

- I can't imagine what **he** likes about jazz.

Also: arrange, calculate, check, choose, debate, determine, discover, discuss, establish, find out, forget, guess, imagine, know, learn, notice, plan, realise, remember, say, see, talk about, think (about), understand, wonder

B Some verbs must have an object before the **wh**-clause:

- She **reminded** **me** *what* (I had) to do.
- I **told** **Linda** *how* to get to my house.

Also: advise, inform, instruct, teach, warn

The verbs **ask** and **show** often have an object before a **wh**-clause, but not always:

- I **asked** (**him**) *how* I could get to the station, and he told me.

These verbs can also be followed by **object + wh-word + to**-infinitive:

- She **taught** **me** *how* to play chess.
- I **showed** **her** *where* to put her coat.

C We can often use **the way** instead of **how** referring to either the route or the means:

- Go back **the way** (that / by which) you came. (*or informally* Go back **how** you came.)
- Have you noticed **the way** (that / in which) he spins the ball? (*or ... noticed how* he spins ...?)

Note that we don't use 'the way how'. (e.g. *not* Go back the way how you came.)

D **Whether**

We can use **whether** as the **wh**-word in a **wh**-clause when we want to show possible choices.

Whether has a similar meaning to 'if' (see Unit 86):

- He couldn't remember **whether** / **if** he had turned the computer off.

Some verbs can be followed by **whether + to**-infinitive to talk about the choice between two or more possibilities. Note that 'if' is never used before a **to**-infinitive:

- You have 14 days to **decide whether to keep** it or not. (*not ... to decide if to keep it or not.*)

Also: choose, consider, debate, determine, discuss, know (in questions and negatives), think about, wonder (= 'talking' or 'thinking about choices' verbs)

Some other 'talking' and 'thinking about choices' verbs are *not* used with **whether + to**-infinitive, including **ask, conclude, explain, imagine, realise, speculate, think**.

E Note the difference between these sentences. The first has a **wh**-clause with **whether** and the second has a **that**-clause (see Unit 33):

- I didn't know **whether** the shop was shut. (= if the shop was shut or not)
- I didn't know **that** the shop was shut. (suggests that the shop was shut)

F In rather formal contexts, particularly in writing, we can use **as to** with a meaning similar to 'about' or 'concerning' before a **wh**-clause. This is most common before **whether**:

- Opinion was divided **as to whether** the findings from the study were representative of the population as a whole. (*or less formally ... divided whether ...*)

Exercises

34.1 Match sentence beginnings 1–10 to endings a–j and choose an appropriate **wh-word** to connect them. If necessary, add an appropriate object. **A & B**

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|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 Before the meeting finished they arranged ... | a ... to fit the parts back together. |
| 2 He took my hands and showed ... | b ... she went after that. |
| 3 I explained carefully so that the students understood ... | c ... to put their coats. |
| 4 Anna was new in the office and I had to keep reminding ... | d ... to meet next. |
| 5 I saw Sarah leave the building, but I didn't notice ... | e ... Helen wasn't with him. |
| 6 When I saw Hugo alone at the party I wondered ... | f ... many sweets were in the jar. |
| 7 As we walked over the hills the guide warned ... | g ... they had to do in the test. |
| 8 After I'd dismantled the motor I couldn't remember ... | h ... the path was dangerous. |
| 9 To win a prize you had to guess ... | i ... everyone was. |
| 10 As the guests came in Diego told ... | j ... to hold the golf club properly. |

1 + d Before the meeting finished they arranged when / where to meet next.

34.2 Underline the correct or more appropriate verb. **D**

- 1 She was *thinking* / *debating* whether to invite Jeremy over for dinner.
- 2 The council is meeting this morning to *discuss* / *ask* whether to increase local taxes.
- 3 Apparently Louis and Eva are *considering* / *speculating* whether to emigrate to Australia.
- 4 I have to *imagine* / *choose* whether to get a job or apply to go to college.
- 5 Scientists will have to *decide* / *conclude* soon whether to start testing the new drugs on people.

34.3 Zak Miles has written a book about mountain climbing in the Andes. Correct any mistakes in these extracts. **A–F**

The villagers warned ^{me} / what the conditions were like at higher altitudes, and advised to take enough food for a week. There was some discussion through the day as whether the snow would arrive before my descent from the mountain, but I never imagined how hard the conditions would be. In the morning they showed me the way how to get to the track up the mountain.

When the snow started falling it was very light, and I couldn't decide if to carry on or go back down. Soon, however, I couldn't see where to go.

I wondered if to retrace my steps and try to find the track again, but by the time I decided whether I should go back, the track had disappeared.

As the snow got heavier I began to realise whether my life was in danger. Fortunately, my years in the Andes had taught what to do in extreme conditions. I knew that there was a shepherd's hut somewhere on this side of the mountain that I could shelter in, but I didn't know that it was nearby or miles away.