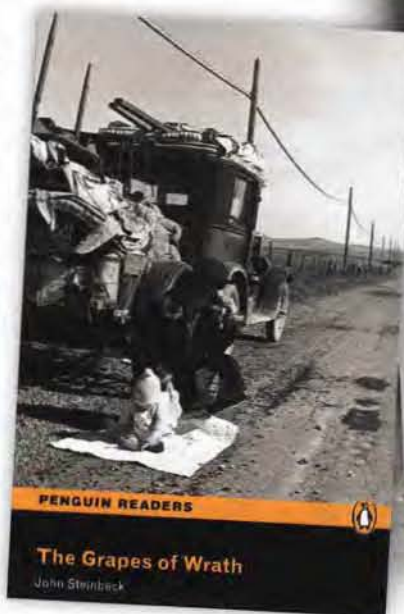


77 Other noun structures

The Grapes of Wrath, by John Steinbeck, is a fascinating book. It describes **what life was like** for poor American farmers in the 1930s.



1 Wh- clauses

Wh- clauses can express the same as a noun or noun phrase, but we tend to use them more in informal English.

NOUN PHRASE	Wh- CLAUSE
<i>I don't agree with their decision.</i>	→ <i>I don't agree with what they decided.</i>
<i>Have you been to our house?</i>	→ <i>Have you been to where we live?</i>
<i>They told us about the designer.</i>	→ <i>They told us about who designed it.</i>
<i>I don't understand this method.</i>	→ <i>I don't understand how you do it.</i>

- **Wh- clauses** are not the same as relative clauses:
*I don't agree with **their decision**.* (noun phrase)
 → *I don't agree with **what they decided**.* (wh- clause)
 → *I don't agree with the decision **that they made**.* (relative clause)
- The **wh- clause** acts like a noun, so it can be the subject or object of a verb:
What he did made us very angry. (= His actions made us angry.)
 It describes **what life was like** for poor farmers in the 1930s.
 (= It describes poor farmers' living conditions.)

What usually means 'the thing(s) that':

What we do is more important than **what we know**.

(= The things we do are more important than the things we know.)

*I don't know much about art, but I know **what I like**.* (= I know the things that I like.)

- ⚠ We don't include the noun in a clause beginning with **what**:
 ✗ *I don't agree with the decision **what they decided**.* ✓ *I don't agree with **what they decided**.*

Relative clauses with **when, where** and **why** ▶ Unit 72.3

2 Comparison clauses with nouns

We usually make comparisons using adjectives and adverbs (▶ Units 21, 22).

But we can also compare nouns:

*She's **richer** than me.* → *She's got **more money** than me.*

*Their house is **bigger** than ours.* → *Their house **has more space** than ours.*

*Nowadays it **doesn't take as long** to get there.* → *Nowadays it **takes less time** to get there.*

We can also make superlative forms using **the most/the least** + noun:

*Of all our staff, Jackie had **the fewest complaints**.*

*Sally has **the least money**, so we should let her have the **cheapest** ticket.*

More on **more/less** and **the most/the least** ▶ Unit 12.3 **less** ▶ Units 21 and 25