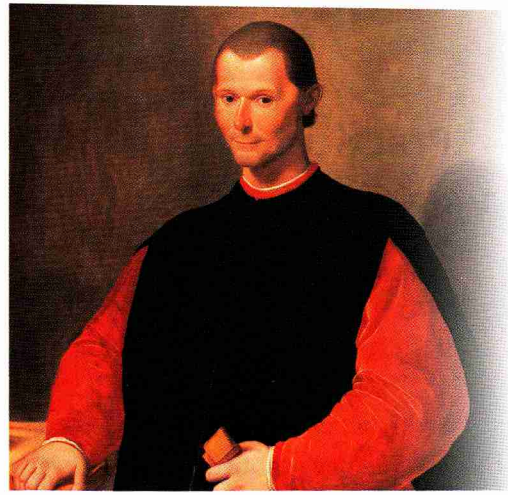


57 Noun clauses and other noun structures

Machiavelli is a well-known character from Italian political history, although he is more famous for what he wrote than for what he did.



1 Noun clauses

A noun clause can start with *that*, *if/whether* or a *wh-* word.

The clause acts like a noun:

*Did you notice **that she left early**?* (= Did you notice her early departure?)

*He asked **if I intended to leave**.* (= He asked my intentions.)

*I'll never understand **why he did it**.* (= I'll never understand his reasons [for doing it].)

These clauses are common in spoken English as noun phrases can sound rather formal:

*Please inform us of **your final decision**.* (formal)

*Let us know **if you want to go ahead**.* (informal)

Because a noun clause acts like a noun, it can be the subject or object of a verb:

***What they did** doesn't interest me. I'm not interested in **what they did**.*

We can use *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, *who* and *how* to introduce a *wh-* noun clause:

noun phrase		wh- clause
<i>I was quite shocked by his behaviour.</i>	→	<i>I was quite shocked by what he did.</i>
<i>The school isn't far from our home.</i>	→	<i>The school isn't far from where we live.</i>
<i>The label doesn't say the name of the painter.</i>	→	<i>The label doesn't say who painted it.</i>

More on clauses with *where*, *when*, etc. ► Unit 54.3

What usually means *the thing(s) (that)*. We can use a *what* clause to replace a noun + defining relative clause if the noun we are referring to is clear from the context:

*Tell us about **the event (that) you witnessed**.* → *Tell us about **what you saw**.*

*I'm afraid **the dish (that) I like** isn't on the menu.* → *I'm afraid **what I like** isn't on the menu.*

! We don't include the noun in a *what* clause:

✗ *It was **the money what I wanted**, not **the fame**.*

✓ *It was **the money (that) I wanted**, not **the fame**.*

OR *The money was **what I wanted**, not **the fame**.* (= the thing that I wanted)

2 Comparison clauses with nouns

We can compare nouns which refer to amounts by using *more*, *less* and *fewer*. A clause beginning with *than* can be added after the noun:

*Now **that we've built the extension**, our house has a lot **more space than** it used to.*

*Property taxes usually produce **less income than** customs duties do.*

*Due to the congestion charge there are **fewer cars** in central London **than** there were previously.*

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

***The most time** you should spend on the running machine is twenty minutes.*

*The exam papers with **the fewest mistakes** will gain the highest marks.*

We use *fewer/fewest* with plural nouns and *less/least* with uncountable nouns, although in casual speech *less* is sometimes used with both:

*This checkout is for customers with **fewer than five items**.*

*It would taste better if you used **less salt than** you did this time.*

[*It doesn't seem very busy. Do you think there are **less people** here today **than** there are usually?*]

More on *less* ► Unit 14.2 More on *few* ► Unit 8.2