

Dependent Clauses

Dependent Clauses

Relative clauses, as combined units of meaning, can function as adjectives or nouns.

Subordinate clauses, as combined units of meaning, most frequently act as adverbs or nouns (infrequently, they function as adjectives).

Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions are used to connect subordinate clauses to some sentence element in a main clause.

See D&D p. 209 for a list of subordinate conjunctions and relative pronouns.

When used as adverb clauses, subordinate clauses often modify verbs. Adverbial clauses answer the questions *why*, *when*, *where*, *how* – but not *what*.

The flight was postponed [*because* the pilot had an aching toe.]
{*why*}

(You) Try it once more [*before* you give up.] {*when*}

We'll miss the last bus [*if* we don't hurry.] {*why*}

Vincent will fail his tests [*unless* he does some serious study.]
{*why*}

It looks [*as if* it might rain.] {*how*}

The adverb clause may precede the main clause:

[*When* the bell rings,] you'll see a mad rush.
[*After* he left,] I found his briefcase in the sink.

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Subordinate clauses that act as noun clauses are most commonly used as objects or predicate nouns.

He thinks [*that* no one else can do the job.] *d.o.*

Nobody knows [*where* the coffee pot is.] *d.o.*

You must decide [*whether* the reward is worth the effort.] *d.o.*

The question is [*how* we can control him.] *p.n.*

They can also be used as subjects of a clause:

[How they were to find the apples] was not said. *sub.*

[When we will pay the piper] can be negotiated. *sub.*

Some subordinate clauses function adjectivally.

Toddy looked in the well [where Megan had secreted her diary.] *adj.*

The workmanship [where it could be seen] was poor at best. *adj.*

Be Careful: Some of the words used as subordinating conjunctions can also be used as prepositions. The same is true of the **coordinating** conjunctions *but* and *for*.

As I predicted, Sam is causing trouble again. (sub. conj.)

He has served three terms *as* captain. (prep.)

I haven't seen Joe *since* his garage fell down. (sub. conj.)

I haven't seen Joe *since* Thursday. (prep.)

They're willing enough, *but* they need more practice. (coord. conj.)

You seem to have everything *but* the kitchen sink. (prep.)

Be Extra Careful: "That" can function as either a relative pronoun or a subordinate conjunction (among other functions); you must determine its identity through its use.

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Some Random Dependent Clauses

As a noun

I heard his *comment*. (noun)

I heard *what he said*. (relative clause as noun)

As an adjective

The food is distributed to the *neediest* families. (adj.)

The food is distributed to the families *that need it most*. (relative clause as adj.)

As an adverb

You ought to come *early*. (adv)

{***See usage note for “ought” in AHD***}

You ought to come *before the other guests arrive*. (subordinate clause as adv.)

What he needs is a complete rest. (relative clause as subject)

Whatever you decide is satisfactory to me. (relative clause as subject)

My feeling is *that the boy is innocent*. (sub c. as PN)

That was *why I waited*. (sub c. as PN)

I know *what you’re thinking*. (rel c. as DO)

Can you explain *how the accident happened?* (sub c. as DO).

Give it to *whoever needs it*. (rel. c. as object of preposition)

He worries about *how his business will be affected*.

(sub. clause as object of preposition)

With the expletive “it”

(A noun clause may appear at the end of a sentence, introduced by the expletive *it*. In this construction, which is fairly common, the noun clause is considered the subject of the verb.)

Where he gets his supply is not generally known.

It is not generally known *where he gets his supply*.

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That her mother was there was unfortunate.
It is unfortunate *that her mother was there*.

Relative clauses functioning as adjectives regularly follow the noun or pronoun that they modify.

I know a man *who owns one*.
He is a man *whom everyone admires*.
The rifle *of which you speak* never belonged to me.
The rifle *which you speak of* never belonged to him.
The garden *that surrounds the house* is overgrown with weeds.

In many sentences the relative pronoun can be omitted, particularly when it is the object of a verb or a preposition:

The man *she married* couldn't support her
("whom she married")
Everybody *I speak to* seems to agree. ("to whom I speak")
The picture *I showed you* is a Vermeer. ("that I showed you")
The route *he took* is a little shorter ("that he took")

Impacted Relative Clauses

Also called double relative clauses. Consider the grammar of the most basic, but complete clause, then use it appropriately within the second.

Jane likes to congratulate [whomever she thinks had a bad day].

Thinking about [whomever she believes loves dogs] has become a mission of sorts for Zoey.

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Conjunctions

A conjunction is a word whose primary function is to join words or groups of words. There are two main types of conjunctions: **coordinating** conjunctions (which include **correlative** conj.) and **subordinating** conjunctions.

Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions are normally used to connect sentence elements of the same grammatical class: nouns with nouns, adverbs with adverbs, clauses with clauses.

The words used as coordinating conjunctions are *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *yet*, and *so*.

Correlative Conjunctions

The coordinating conjunctions *and*, *but*, *or*, and *nor* are often used with *both*, *not only*, *either*, and *neither*, respectively, to form what are known as correlative conjunctions. Correlatives are always used in pairs.

Both faculty *and* administrators will back such a contract.

Usually the meaning is practically the same as it would be with a simple coordinating conjunction, but there is an additional degree of emphasis.

Dependent Clauses

Relative clauses can act as adjectives or nouns. Subordinate clauses can act as adverbs or nouns (and infrequently as adjectives). We introduced relative clauses when discussing pronouns.

Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions are used to connect adverb or noun (subordinate) clauses to some sentence element in a main clause. They do not connect adjective clauses, which are introduced and joined by relative pronouns.

Here are some words commonly used as subordinating conjunctions: *when, because, if, though, after, unless, until, whether*. Depending on its use, “that” can be a relative pronoun or subordinate conjunction {The dogs will go anywhere that they are welcome. – “that they are welcome” is modifying anywhere, an adverb; it is a subordinate clause}.

See a more complete list on p. 209.