Main Clauses and Subordinate Clauses

A clause is a group of words that contains at least one subject and at least one verb.

The two types of clauses are main clause and subordinate clause.

1. A **main clause** is a group of words that contains at least one subject and one verb and that **expresses a complete idea**.

2. A **subordinate clause** is a group of words that contains at least one subject and one verb but that **does not express a complete idea**. All subordinate clauses begin with **subordinators**.

**EXAMPLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sub. clause</th>
<th>main clause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Although he seldom plays,]</td>
<td>[Raymond is an excellent golfer.]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This example contains two clauses, each with a subject and a verb. As you can see, the clause *Raymond is an excellent golfer* could stand by itself as a sentence. But the clause *Although he seldom plays* cannot stand by itself (even though it has a subject and a verb) because it needs the main clause to complete its thought and because it begins with the subordinator *although*.

Subordinators

**Subordinators** indicate the relationship between the subordinate clause and the main clause. Learning to recognize the two types of subordinators—subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns—will help you identify subordinate clauses.
### Subordinating Conjunctions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>after</td>
<td>so that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>although</td>
<td>than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as</td>
<td>though</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as if</td>
<td>unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as long as</td>
<td>until</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because</td>
<td>when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before</td>
<td>whenever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>even though</td>
<td>wherever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if</td>
<td>wherever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>since</td>
<td>while</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Some of the words in the above list of subordinators are underlined (*after, as, before, since, until*). These words are used as prepositions when they do not introduce a subordinate clause.

### EXAMPLES

- **prepositional phrase:** *after dinner*
- **subordinate clause:** *after I eat dinner*

The following are examples of sentences containing subordinate clauses. (Note that each subordinate clause begins with a subordinator.)

#### EXAMPLES

- **main clause**
- **sub. clause**

  [**Before** his horse had crossed the finish line,] [the jockey suddenly stood up in his saddle.]

- **main clause**
- **sub. clause**

  [Fried Spam is a dish] [that few people love.]

- **main clause**
- **sub. clause**

  [Antonio won the spelling bee] [because he spelled *penicillin* correctly.]

#### PRACTICE

Identify the following word groups as main clauses (MC) or subordinate clauses (SC) or neither (N).

1. When the moon shone on the river. **SC**
2. The baseball season had finally started. **N**
3. Then the sun twirled like a windmill. **N**
4. Below the clouds in the sky. **N**
5. When Beyoncé started to sing. **N**
6. The statue of the woman had no head.

7. Which Abbie found hard to believe.

8. Finally, we could get some sleep.

9. That Karl Marx had written.

10. Once upon a time.

PRACTICE Identify the following word groups as subordinate clauses (SC) or prepositional phrases (PP).

1. Since the dampness was harmful.  
   SC

2. Since the last triceratops disappeared.  

3. Since the Battle of Bull Run.  

4. As a successful rodeo clown.  

5. As Homer was stirring the black-eyed peas.  

6. After the Flat Earth Society opened its doors.  

7. After yesterday’s heavy storm.  

8. After the President’s inaugural address.  

9. Until Vincent saw the sky.  

10. Until the Sean Penn’s last movie.  

PRACTICE Underline the subordinate clauses in the following sentences and circle the subordinators. Not all sentences contain subordinate clauses.

1. A misanthrope is a person who does not like people.

2. Lewis Carroll created the word chortle, which is a combination of two other words.

3. After the battle in the lake, Beowulf returned to the hall.

4. Puck gave the potion to Titania, who was sleeping.
5. If you really loved me, you would give your chocolate to me.

6. A reformed slave trader wrote “Amazing Grace,” which is played at police officers’ funerals.

7. He retook the oath of office because the Chief Justice had misplaced one of the words.

8. Sylvia, whose clothes were totally inappropriate, was embarrassed.

9. Fergal was all smiles after he read Ulysses for the third time.

10. Gettysburg was the place where the most important battle was fought.

Adverb and Adjective Subordinate Clauses

Subordinate clauses may function as adverbs, adjectives, or nouns in their sentences. Therefore, they are called adverb clauses, adjective clauses, or noun clauses. We will be discussing adverb and adjective clauses, but not noun clauses. Although we frequently use noun clauses in our writing, they seldom present problems in punctuation or clarity.

Adverb Clauses

Like single-word adverbs, adverb subordinate clauses can modify verbs. For example, in the sentence Clare ate a big breakfast because she had a busy day ahead of her, the adverb clause because she had a busy day ahead of her modifies the verb ate. It explains why Clare ate a big breakfast.

Another characteristic of adverb clauses is that they begin with a subordinating conjunction, not a relative pronoun. In addition, in most cases an adverb clause can be moved around in its sentence, and the sentence will still make sense.

EXAMPLES

[When she ate the mushroom,] Alice grew taller.

Alice grew taller [when she ate the mushroom.]

Alice, [when she ate the mushroom,] grew taller.

NOTE: When the adverb clause begins the sentence, it is followed by a comma, as in the first example. When the adverb clause ends a sentence, no comma is needed. When the adverb clause interrupts the main clause, it is enclosed by commas.
Underline the adverb clauses in the following sentences. Circle the subordinating conjunctions.

1. If you leave now, you will miss the eruption of Vesuvius.
2. Whenever Homer wants a snack, he fries a thick slab of Spam.
3. Narcissus stared into the stream because he was in love.
4. Although the old man’s wings were dirty and broken, everyone believed he was an angel.
5. James Barrie was inspired to write *Peter Pan* by a family after he told stories of Peter to the children of a friend.

Add adverb clauses of your own to the following main clauses in the spaces indicated. Use commas where they are needed.

1. He laid his daughter Regan down for a nap *because she had been acting tired all morning*.
2. *Robert E. Lee was appointed president of a college*,
3. *Cyrus eats twice a week at a Thai restaurant*.
4. *Homer asked for a bag for his black-eyed peas*.
5. *the emperor walked naked into the village*.

**Adjective Clauses**

Adjective subordinate clauses modify nouns or pronouns just as single-word adjectives do. Adjective clauses follow the nouns or pronouns they modify, and they usually begin with a *relative pronoun*—who, whom, whose, which, that.
(and sometimes *when* or *where*). As you can see in the examples below, relative pronouns sometimes serve as subjects of their clauses. We will discuss the rules for punctuating adjective clauses in Chapter Three.

**EXAMPLES**

The horse [that Mr. Lee liked best] was named Traveller. (The adjective clause modifies *horse*.)

On the top shelf was the trophy [that Irma had won for her model of the Battle of Shiloh]. (The adjective clause modifies *trophy*.)

Hampton, [which is Michelle’s hooded rat,] resides at the foot of her bed. (The adjective clause modifies *Hampton*, and the relative pronoun *which* is the subject of the clause.)

**NOTE:** As you can see in the example above, the adjective clause often appears between the subject and the verb of the main clause. In addition, as you can see in the following example, sometimes the relative pronoun is left out.

**EXAMPLE**

The man [I met yesterday] works for the CIA. (Here the adjective clause modifies the noun *man*, but the relative pronoun *whom* is left out.)

**A note about relative pronouns:**

1. Use *who* or *whom* to refer to people only.
2. Use *which* to refer to nonhuman things only, such as animals or objects.
3. Use *that* to refer to either people or nonhuman things.

**PRACTICE**

Underline the adjective clauses in the following sentences and circle the relative pronouns.

1. Beethoven’s Fifth is the new bar that opened on Verde Avenue.

2. A cello player whom the owner knew led the house band.

3. The next player hired was a pianist who was the wife of the cellist.

4. Rum Adagio, which is my favorite drink, is always served in a bright red glass.

5. A Persian cat that everyone calls Ludwig begs for treats on the bar.
Add adjective clauses of your own to the following main clauses.

1. Ludwig has her own special dish by the back door.
   
   **Ludwig, who is picky, has her own special dish by the back door.**

2. The eagle flew into the trees.

3. No one at the Monterey Bay Aquarium had ever met Poseidon.

4. The Belly Up is a popular music venue in San Diego County.

5. Many people make resolutions for the next year on New Year’s Eve.

In the following sentences, underline the subordinate clauses and identify them as adverb clauses (Adv) or adjective clauses (Adj).

1. After the club closes, the musicians play their own compositions.  **Adv**

2. Because the new President values good music, Yo-Yo Ma played at his inauguration.

3. Enrique often dreamed about his grandparents, who lived in Chihuahua, Mexico.
4. When the double rainbow appeared in the sky, Finnegan grabbed my mother and kissed her.

5. A dog that had long ears and a goofy laugh kept following me around the amusement park.

**Practice**

Add subordinate clauses of your own to the following main clauses and indicate whether you have added an adverb clause (Adv) or an adjective clause (Adj).

1. Rupert decided to sell his stamp collection.

   Rupert, who was desperate for extra money, decided ________

   to sell his stamp collection. (Adv)

2. The building burst into flames and burned to the ground.

   ________

   ________

3. The monk sat in a lotus position and took three deep breaths.

   ________

   ________

4. Prometheus warmed his hands by the fire.

   ________

   ________

5. Bill Gates and Steve Jobs began to argue.

   ________

   ________
Section One Review

1. A clause is a group of words that contains at least one subject and at least one verb.

2. A main clause is a group of words that contains at least one subject and one verb and that expresses a complete idea.

3. A subordinate clause is a group of words that contains at least one subject and one verb but that does not express a complete idea.

4. Subordinate clauses begin with subordinators.

5. Adverb subordinate clauses usually modify verbs and begin with subordinating conjunctions.

6. Adjective subordinate clauses modify nouns or pronouns and begin with relative pronouns.
Underline all subordinate clauses and circle the subordinators. In the spaces provided, indicate whether the subordinate clause is an adverb clause (Adv) or an adjective clause (Adj). If a sentence contains no subordinate clause, do nothing to it.

1. The chairman suggested a solution that he thought would help the homeless people in his town.  
   
2. As Mr. Hyde made his appearance, Dr. Jekyll disappeared.  
   
3. After the poetry reading, we stopped by some snowy woods.  
   
4. Homer’s plate of spaghetti, which he had covered with Spam meatballs, fell to the floor.  
   
5. If you text me again, I’ll break your cell phone.  
   
6. Laura forgave her guest for breaking her glass unicorn even though it was her most prized possession.  
   
7. The man who was floating on a coffin said his name was Ishmael.  
   
8. When Oedipus realized the truth, he was somewhat upset.  
   
9. Wherever she looked, Dorothy saw lions and tigers and bears.  
   
10. Before leaving for China, we played a game of Marco Polo in the swimming pool.  
   
11. *House*, which features a drug-addicted, cynical doctor, was one of the most popular television shows in 2008.  
   
12. Hortense found a Spam recipe that she had not tried.  
   
13. Because Bill had graduated *summa cum laude*, he looked down on us little people.  
   
14. You will see the Nike in the Louvre if you look closely.  
   
15. Everyone still loved Steve even though he had moved into administration.  

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CHAPTER 2

Exercise 1A
A. Join the pairs of sentences below by making one of them either an adverb or an adjective subordinate clause. You may need to delete or change some words.

1. The zookeeper comforted the frightened king cobra.  
The cobra had been attacked by a mongoose.

   The zookeeper comforted the frightened king cobra that had been attacked by a mongoose.

2. Mick Jagger draws huge crowds.  
He is over sixty-five years old.

B. Write subordinate clauses (adjective or adverb) in the blanks as indicated in parentheses at the beginning of the sentence. Make sure your clauses have subjects and verbs.

6. (Adv) **Because he was absolutely famished,** Homer added some pigs’ feet to his casserole.

7. (Adj or Adv) Homer and Hortense visited the Grand Ole Opry ___________________________

8. (Adj) Adrian Monk, __________________________, washes his hands at least ten times each day.
continued


10. (Adv or Adj) Fumiko missed her brothers and sisters ____________________________

C. To the main clauses below, add the types of subordinate clauses indicated in parentheses. Add your clause at any place in the sentence that you feel is appropriate. For instance, you may add an adjective clause to any noun in a sentence.

11. (Adv) Driving your car along the Northwest Coast is a beautiful trip.

   If you take the time to enjoy the view, driving your car along ____________________________

   the Northwest Coast is a beautiful trip.

12. (Adj) Andrea took off her hat in the museum.

13. (Adj) Brutus looked for the Ides of March on the calendar.

14. (Adv or Adj) Jackson Pollock was once called “Jack the Dripper.”

15. (Adv) The sun rises in the east and sets in the west.
Underline all subordinate clauses and identify the type of clause (adjective or adverb) in the spaces provided.

1. One of my favorite places is San Francisco’s Pier 39, which I will always remember for its wonderful blend of unique sights, sounds, and smells. **Adj**

2. As I walked down the pier one weekend last summer, I noticed a cook dressed all in white tossing pizza dough to lure hungry customers. 

3. Near him I saw cooks who were roasting and baking all kinds of seafood. 

4. Among the foods that caught my attention were lobster, shark, and clam chowder on sourdough bread. 

5. I soon encountered some people being entertained by hundreds of sea lions making a tremendous racket as they played on the rocks and sunbathed by the pier. 

6. When I turned away from the sea lions, my nose followed an aroma coming from a waffle ice cream stand. 

7. Because I could not resist, I ordered vanilla ice cream with M & Ms mixed in. 

8. The hot waffle cone warmed my hand while the cold ice cream refreshed my throat. 

9. Next I came across a delightful shop, where I found all sorts of posters for children’s books like *James and the Giant Peach*. 

10. After I left the poster place, I spotted a chocolate shop and almost swooned in anticipation. 

11. Although I was tempted, I declined the chocolate models of Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge. 

12. Across from the chocolate shop, I saw a restaurant that was built to look like Alcatraz Prison. 

13. People could have their pictures taken in a prison cell while they were waiting to eat. 

14. Close by I saw the tour boat that was taking tourists to Alcatraz Island. 

15. As night fell across San Francisco Bay, I could admire the beauty of the Golden Gate Bridge from the tip of Pier 39. 

16. Before I left, I felt the salty mist of the bay on my skin, a final remembrance of Pier 39.