

The Subordinate Conjunction

Recognize a *subordinate conjunction* when you see one.

Some sentences are *complex*. Such sentences have *two* clauses, one main [or *independent*] and one subordinate [or *dependent*].

The essential ingredient in a complex sentence is the subordinate conjunction:

after	once	until
although	provided that	when
as	rather than	whenever
because	since	where
before	so that	whereas
even if	than	wherever
even though	that	whether
if	though	while
in order that	unless	why

The subordinate conjunction has two jobs. First, it provides a necessary transition between the two ideas in the sentence. This transition will indicate a *time, place, or cause and effect* relationship. Here are some examples:

Louisa will wash the sink full of her dirty dishes **once** her roommate Shane cleans his stubble and globs of shaving cream from the bathroom sink.

We looked on top of the refrigerator, **where** Jenny will often hide a bag of chocolate chip cookies.

Because her teeth were chattering in fear, Lynda clenched her jaw muscle while waiting for her turn to audition.

The second job of the subordinate conjunction is to reduce the importance of one clause so that a reader understands which of the two ideas is more important. The more important idea belongs in the main clause, the less important in the clause introduced by the subordinate conjunction.

Read these examples:

As Samson blew out the birthday candles atop the cake, he burned the tip of his nose on a stubborn flame.

Burning his nose > blowing out candles.

Ronnie begins to sneeze violently **whenever he opens the door to greet a fresh spring day**.

Sneezing violently > opening the door.

Even though Dana persevered at the calculus exam, she was only adding another *F* beside her name in Dr. Armour's grade book.

Adding another *F* > persevering at the exam.

Punctuate a complex sentence correctly.

Complex sentences follow two common patterns:

MAIN CLAUSE + Ø + **SUBORDINATE CLAUSE** .

Nicky shook her head and sighed Ø *as she puzzled over the algebra problem*.

SUBORDINATE CLAUSE + , + **MAIN CLAUSE** .

When the doorbell rang, Nicky slammed shut her textbook and rose to pay for her pizza.

Punctuation gets trickier when the subordinate clause begins with a relative pronoun like **who**, **which**, or **where**. Sometimes you will need a comma, and sometimes you won't, depending on whether the clause is essential or nonessential.

When the information in the relative clause clarifies an otherwise general noun, the clause is essential and will follow the same pattern that you saw above:

MAIN CLAUSE + Ø + **ESSENTIAL RELATIVE CLAUSE** .

Nicky paid the deliveryman Ø *whose rusty hatchback choked and coughed in the driveway*.

Deliveryman is a general noun. Which one are we talking about? The relative clause *whose rusty hatchback choked and coughed in the driveway* clarifies the restaurant employee we mean. The clause is thus essential and requires no punctuation.

When a relative clause follows a specific noun, punctuation changes. The information in the relative clause is no longer as important, and the clause becomes nonessential. Nonessential clauses require you to use commas to connect them.

MAIN CLAUSE + , + **NONESSENTIAL RELATIVE CLAUSE** .

Nicky paid Fernando, *whose rusty hatchback choked and coughed in the driveway*.

Fernando, the name of a *unique restaurant employee*, lets us know which deliveryman we mean. The information in the relative clause is no longer important and needs to be separated from the main clause with a comma.

Relative clauses can also *interrupt* a main clause. When this happens, use no punctuation for an essential clause. But if the clause is nonessential, separate it with a comma in front *and* a comma behind. Take a look at these examples:

After seeing the cheap tip, the man \emptyset ***who delivered Nicky's pizza*** \emptyset wished that he had driven more slowly.

After seeing the cheap tip, Fernando, ***who delivered Nicky's pizza***, wished that he had driven more slowly.



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