Introduction to Complex Sentences: Using Dependent Clauses

Complex sentences are made of independent and dependent clauses. You already learned about independent clauses (subject-verb sets that express a complete thought). Now it is time to learn about dependent clauses. Just like independent clauses, dependent clauses contain a subject-verb set. Unlike independent clauses, dependent clauses do not express a complete thought. They depend on an independent clause in order to make complete sense, which is why they are called dependent clauses and why they should always be attached to an independent clause.

There are two types of dependent clauses: 1) those that are created with subordinating conjunctions and 2) those that are created with relative pronouns.

1. Dependent Clauses Made with Subordinating Conjunctions

Some dependent clauses start with a subordinating conjunction, like the ones listed below.

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>after</td>
<td>because</td>
<td>like (means “as”)</td>
<td>until</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>although</td>
<td>before</td>
<td>once</td>
<td>when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as</td>
<td>even if</td>
<td>since</td>
<td>whenever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as if</td>
<td>even though</td>
<td>so that</td>
<td>whereas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as long as</td>
<td>ever since</td>
<td>than</td>
<td>wherever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as soon as</td>
<td>if</td>
<td>though</td>
<td>whether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as though</td>
<td>in order that</td>
<td>unless</td>
<td>while</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Notice: Adding a subordinating conjunction to an independent clause creates a dependent clause.

We went to school. = independent clause
[when we went to school] = dependent clause
[before we went to school] = dependent clause

If you do not attach a dependent clause to an independent clause, it is considered a sentence fragment. It depends on the independent clause to express the complete thought. So dependent clauses should always be attached to an independent clause.

Example: When we went to school. = sentence fragment

One way to fix a dependent-clause fragment is to attach it to an independent clause:

Example: [When we arrived at school], we went straight to the Learning Center.

Comma Rules for Dependent Clauses Made with Subordinating Conjunctions

1. When the dependent clause comes before the independent clause, use a comma to separate the dependent clause from the independent clause.

[DC], IC. [When I won the lottery], I bought a turquoise Lamborghini.

2. If the dependent clause comes after the independent clause, a comma is usually not needed.

IC [DC]. I bought a turquoise Lamborghini [when I won the lottery].
2. Dependent Clauses Made with Relative Pronouns

Another kind of dependent clause begins with relative pronouns; we also call these relative clauses.

Here are six common relative pronouns: who, whom, whose, which, where, and that.

If a relative pronoun is used to ask a question, it is a sentence by itself and not a dependent clause:

Who left this message? Which car is yours? These questions are complete thoughts. However, they can be used to create dependent clauses, which is not a complete thought.

The instructor who had left the message yesterday will call again tomorrow.

My Prius, which is my work car, was stolen last night.

Caution: That can be used to express a complete thought: When it identifies the word right after it, it is used to describe that word.

That car is mine. Here “That care is mine.” is a complete thought and not a dependent clause.

But when it isn’t used as above, it usually starts a dependent clause.

The Prius that you gave to me was stolen last night. Here “that you gave to me” is a relative clause.

Remember all dependent clauses, including relative clauses, should be attached to an independent clause; otherwise, it is considered a sentence fragment.

I can’t believe you weren’t injured. When you totaled your care. = fragment
I attended a high school. That was in Hays, Kansas. = fragment

When relative clauses, which begin with a relative pronoun, describe a noun (people, places, and things), they should go directly after (or very closely after) the word they describe.

Children [who watch TV all day] often don’t read well.

[who watch TV all day] describes “children.”

We fed the birds [that visited our yard].

[that visited our yard] describes “birds”.

Two Rules for Punctuating Relative Clauses

Punctuating relative clauses with commas can be a little tricky, so I won’t hold you accountable for correctly using the rules on the second test. But below you will find a brief explanation of the rules.

Rule 1. If the relative clause is not needed to identify the person, place, or thing it describes, we use commas: Andrea Jones, who was my English instructor, will meet us at Woodstock’s. Use commas because we don’t need the information in the relative clause to know who we are talking about.

Rule 2. If the relative clause is needed to identify the person, place, or thing it describes, we don’t use commas: The woman who was my English instructor will meet us at Woodstock’s. Don’t use commas because we need the information in the relative clause to know who we are talking about.

There are a few more rules for using relative clauses, but the first two pages have enough information to keep you busy, so we’ll wait to introduce them to you later or when you are ready for them; just ask.
More on Subordinating Conjunction

Just like coordinating conjunctions, the relationship between an independent clause and a dependent clause is made clear by the subordinating conjunction you choose. Notice how the underlined subordinating conjunction changes the relationship between the clauses in the following examples:

When I am on a diet, I will not eat sugar. [time]
Because I am on a diet, I will not eat sugar. [cause]
If I am on a diet, I will not eat sugar. [condition]

Below are some of the relationships expressed by the subordinating conjunctions.

**Subordinating conjunctions that express TIME:**
- After: After I saw him, . . .
- As: As Jill walked in, . . .
- As soon as: As soon as you get here, . . .
- Before: Before I could say a word, . . .
- Once: Once we made the phone call, . . .
- Until: Until I take my final, . . .
- When: When you see Roger, . . .
- While: While I was studying in the library, . . .

**Subordinating Conjunctions that express WHY or SHOW CAUSE:**
- Because: Because my roommate loves to cook, . . .
- Since: Since you’ve never been to Montana, . . .

**Subordinating Conjunctions that tell LOCATION:**
- Where: Where there is smoke, . . .
- Wherever: Wherever you decide to go, . . .

**Subordinating Conjunctions that show CONTRAST:**
- Although: Although we’d known each other for years, . . .
- Even though: Even though it poured the entire time, . . .
- Though: Though I have been waiting for hours….
- Whereas: Whereas you tend to stay up late, . . .

**Subordinating Conjunctions that set up a CONDITION:**
- If: If you want to see a good movie, . . .
- Unless: Unless the letter is postmarked on Friday, . . .
One last Note: So vs So That

**So** is a coordinating conjunction. When So joins two independent clauses, a comma is needed.

- **Example:** I finished painting my house, so now it’s time to think about the plumbing.

**SO THAT** is a subordinating conjunction. SO THAT creates a dependent clause when it is placed in front of a subject-verb set. Be aware that we do not always say or write the *that* in SO THAT. Even when *that* is not stated or written, we must still recognize the *implied that* as part of the subordinating conjunction.

- **Example:** I painted my house myself so that I could save money.
  - or
  - I painted my house myself so I could save money. (implied that)

- **Example:** Clyde took a few days off work so that he could spend time with his kids.
  - or
  - Clyde took a few days off work so he could spend time with his kids. (implied that)