

12

Coordination, Subordination, and Correlation

More on Subordinate Clauses



In defining what a subordinate clause is, I said that it's a clause which can't stand alone, which doesn't contain a complete idea. Well, one thing that's almost never clearly discussed in most grammar books when dealing with subordinate clauses is the fact that in context they most certainly can stand alone – but there's a catch.

To show you what I mean, first let's brush up on identifying independent and dependent clauses. We know that subordinate clauses are dependent clauses, right? Okay, so look these sentences over and identify which clause is which, independent or dependent. Write down your answers.

1. He got a second job so that he can save up enough money to buy a car.
 (a) (b)
2. You called while I was trying to nap.
 (a) (b)
3. As much as I want to, I just can't believe what you're saying.
 (a) (b)
4. We'll take a ride-share rather than drive our car downtown.
 (a) (b)
5. Whatever the Court decides, she'll accept their verdict.
 (a) (b)

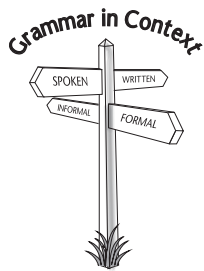
1. (a)
- (b)

2. (a)
 (b)
3. (a)
 (b)
4. (a)
 (b)
5. (a)
 (b)

And here are my answers to compare with yours:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. (a) <u>independent</u> | 4. (a) <u>independent</u> |
| (b) <u>dependent</u> | (b) <u>dependent</u> |
| 2. (a) <u>independent</u> | 5. (a) <u>dependent</u> |
| (b) <u>dependent</u> | (b) <u>independent</u> |
| 3. (a) <u>dependent</u> | |
| (b) <u>independent</u> | |

Now that we're clear again about what makes a dependent and an independent clause, let's get to that failure of most grammar books to mention that there is one way in which dependent clauses can indeed be used like independent ones. Check out the following dialogue:



Allan: I called you this afternoon, you know.

Jean: **While I was trying to nap.**

Allan: Oops! Sorry about that.

Jean: I wanted to tell you that Raúl got a second job.

Allan: Oh? Why did he do that?

Jean: **So that he can save up enough money to buy a car.**

Allan: I know he really wants a car. I'm sure he'll save money every pay day.

Jean: **As much as he can.**

As you can see, the parts of the three sentences above in bold are in fact all dependent clauses, but they work perfectly well in this informal context and are completely understood because they're attached "invisibly" to already mentioned independent clauses, in these cases the clauses "I called you this afternoon," ". . . Raúl got a second job," and ". . . I'm sure he'll save enough money . . ." Notice that this usage of dependent clauses is okay in spoken English and in informal writing, but it wouldn't be common academic or formal, written English.

This is something to keep in mind when teaching subordinate clauses.

Something else that's important to notice is that the three dependent clauses in the dialogue above are all adverbial subordinate clauses because, as I said in Chapter 12, they modify or affect the verb in the independent clause. But what about noun subordinate clauses and adjectival subordinate clauses, also known as relative subordinate clauses?

First off, let's discuss the former. Remember that a noun subordinate clause begins with words like the following:

how	which
that	whichever
what	who
whatever	whoever (whomever)
when	whom
where	why
whether	

Examples: **How they did it** is a mystery to me.
I'll tell you **when I need it**.

By the way, notice that a noun subordinate clause can be the subject or object (direct or indirect) of a sentence. In the first example above, it's the subject; in the second example, it's the direct object.

And there's one more thing to point out: You'll know you're dealing with a noun subordinate clause if it can be substituted with a pronoun, e.g., *he* or *it*:

We should reward **whoever saved the dog**. →
We should reward **her or him**.

How they did it is a mystery to me. →
It's a mystery to me.

Now what about adjectival or relative subordinate clauses? I listed words that begin a noun subordinate clause, so I should do the same thing with adjectival clauses. An adjectival subordinate clause begins with one of these relative pronouns:

that which who(m) whose

or one of these relative adverbs:

when where why

Keep in mind what I mentioned in Chapter 12, that this kind of subordinate clause is called adjectival because it does just what an adjective does, it describes or modifies an already mentioned noun.

Here are a few examples of noun and adjectival subordinate clauses in the following dialogue. Let's do a bit of sleuthing by identifying which numbered subordinate clauses in bold are noun clauses and which are adjectival or relative clauses. Write down your answers.

In the backyard of a private home.

Gino: Wow! Look at your garden. It's just beautiful!

Paolo: Thanks, neighbor.

Gino: **Whatever you're doing to the garden**¹ is really paying off. Just gorgeous!

Paolo: I've learned a lot about gardening from the guy **who owns the nursery on Himeros Street**². You know, the place **that has those giant calla lilies in the front**³?

Gino: Oh, yeah. I see **that his nursery's always busy**⁴.

Paolo: It certainly is! I can't imagine **how he handles so many customers**⁵.

Gino: By the way, I'm nuts about the roses **that you planted over there**⁶. Perfect!

Here are my answers identifying those six clauses. Compare mine to yours:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. noun clause | 4. noun clause |
| 2. adjectival (relative) clause | 5. noun clause |
| 3. adjectival (relative) clause | 6. adjectival (relative) clause |

Before leaving this topic, here are some more examples to show your students a way to identify that a noun clause is in fact a noun clause by substituting the whole clause with a personal pronoun and that a clause is an adjectival or relative clause because it describes, modifies, or affects a noun already mentioned. First, let's look at the noun subordinate clauses:

- A: It's really paying off.
B: What is?
A: **Whatever you're doing to the garden.**
C: Oh, yeah. I know it.
D: Know what?
C: **That his nursery always seems busy.**
E: I can't imagine it.
F: Imagine what?
E: **How he handles so many customers.**

Now let's look at the adjectival or relative subordinate clauses:

- A: I've learned a lot from **the guy.**
B: What guy?
A: The guy **who owns the nursery on Himeros Street.**
C: You know **the place.**
D: What place?
C: The place **that has those giant calla lilies out front.**
E: I'm nuts about **the roses.**
F: Which roses? I've got them on both sides of the garden.
E: I mean the roses **that you planted over there.**