

Definition of a subordinate clause

A subordinate or dependent clause contains a verb and a subject but does not express a complete thought. A subordinate clause cannot stand alone as a sentence:

When Jenny was a teacher...

This is not a complete thought as we do not know what happened when Jenny was a teacher. It is a dependent clause.

A subordinate clause is connected to the **main clause** in a sentence by a subordinate conjunction or a relative pronoun.

Subordinate conjunctions		Relative pronouns	
after	if	that	that
although	in as much as	though	what
	in order that	unless	which
as	just as	until	whichever
as if	lest	when	who
as long as	now	whenever	whoever
as much as	now that	where	whom
as soon as	once	whereas	whose
as though	only if	wherever	whosever
because	provided that	whether	whomever
before	rather than	while	
by the time	since	why	
even	so that		
even if	supposing		
even though	than		
how			

Types of subordinate clauses

A noun clause

The subject or object of a sentence answering the question 'who?' or 'what?'

Whoever takes the minutes will sit next to the chairman.

The New Zealand fans hope **that the All Blacks will win again**.

An adverbial clause

Adds information to the main clause answering questions such as 'when?', 'where?', 'why?', 'with what goal?' and 'under what conditions?'

Jenny was late for the meeting because there was a traffic jam.
If you practise every day, you will have no problem with the exam.

An adjective clause

Modifies the noun by answering questions such as 'which?' or 'what kind of?'

The books that they bought were expensive.
Mr. Nissan, who is Japanese, is visiting Paris.

Note

Whilst a subordinate clause cannot stand alone as a sentence, as it is not a complete thought, it is often used as a response to a question. The complete thought is a function of the question and the answer.

Examples

A. Are you coming to the meeting on Friday?

B. Yes, if I have time.

A. When will you print the report?

B. As soon as I have finished it.

Nominal relative clauses

A nominal relative clause is similar to a defining relative clause, but the noun and relative pronoun are combined in a nominal relative pronoun - usually 'what'.

This is the button (that) you have to press. [defining relative clause]

This is what you have to press. [nominal relative clause]



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