

## CHAPTER 10

### *Subordinating Conjunctions and Complex Sentences*

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#### SECTION 10.1 INTRODUCTION

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This chapter discusses subordinating conjunctions and their role in creating a type of highly informative sentence that is indispensable in scientific and technical writing. Subordinating conjunctions are like coordinating conjunctions in allowing you to combine two sentences into one with a word that shows the relationship between the ideas in the sentences. But there are more subordinating than coordinating conjunctions, thereby offering you more options for combining sentences and allowing you to express more relationships. Also, subordinating conjunctions can often be placed at either the beginning of the combined sentences or between the original sentences. By choosing an appropriate subordinating conjunction and its position, you can emphasize one idea over another, indicating to readers the point you will focus on in the subsequent text. Furthermore, because subordinating conjunctions play such a major role in educational and professional texts, when you have mastered their use, you will have added significantly to the foundation of writing and reading skills that you need for academic and occupational success.

Here are two sentences that can be combined with the subordinating conjunction *because*.

Paul failed two courses.

He must take them again in summer school.

conjunction



comma



*Because* Paul failed two courses, he must take them again in summer school.

Note that *because* is placed at the beginning of this combined sentence, and a comma is placed between the original sentences.

The conjunction *because* is used in expressing a cause-effect relationship between two events.

Because <sup>cause</sup> *Paul failed two courses*, <sup>effect or result</sup> *he must take them again in summer school*.

*Because* is placed before the group of words describing the cause. Use this same pattern in the following exercise.

### Sample Exercise

Here are two sentences, one expressing a cause and the other a result. Use the conjunction *because* to combine the sentences in the pattern shown above.

Cause: It started to drizzle.

Result: People left the beach.

### Answer Explanation

1. The first sentence describes the cause. Therefore *because* is placed before the first sentence.

Because <sup>cause</sup> *it started to drizzle*

2. The second sentence describes the result. To follow the pattern shown above, it must be written after the cause, set off with a comma.

Because <sup>cause</sup> *it started to drizzle*, <sup>result</sup> *people left the beach*.

### Exercise

Use the conjunction *because* to combine these sentences in the pattern shown above.

Cause: Rick enjoyed helping his father work on cars.

Result: He became an automotive engineer.

### Homework Assignment

Write a sentence that presents a cause followed by a result and that uses the pattern shown in the preceding examples and exercises.

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## SECTION 10.2 INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT CLAUSES

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A basic term in the field of grammar is “clause.” A “clause” consists of a subject and a verb. It may also include other grammatical structures such as objects and modifiers. Here are two clauses.

we conserve water

we will soon have a water shortage.

An “independent” clause can stand alone as a sentence. Both of the above clauses are independent clauses and can be written as sentences.

We conserve water.

We will soon have a water shortage.

But a “dependent” clause cannot stand alone. One type of dependent clause contains an extra word that prevents the clause from standing alone. Here is such a dependent clause.

unless we conserve water

The word *unless* prevents this clause from standing alone. If you heard someone say, “unless we conserve water,” you

would expect the person to say something else to complete the thought. You would wonder, What will happen unless we conserve water? A dependent clause must be attached to an independent clause to form a complete sentence.

dependent clause                      independent clause  
Unless we conserve water, we will soon have a water shortage.

A dependent clause is grammatically “dependent” in the sense that it depends on the independent clause to form a complete sentence.

A combination of a dependent clause and an independent clause is called a “complex sentence.”

Complex Sentence  
Unless we conserve water, we will soon have a water shortage.  
dependent clause                      independent clause

The sentences with *because* discussed earlier are also complex sentences. Here is one of them.

Complex Sentence  
Because it started to drizzle, people left the beach.  
dependent clause                      independent clause

The words *because* and *unless* are subordinating conjunctions. When you place a subordinating conjunction before a clause, it becomes a dependent clause and can no longer stand alone. However, it can be combined with an independent clause to form a complex sentence.

In a business organization, a “subordinate” is a person who is lower in rank than someone else. A subordinating conjunction is called “subordinating” because placing it in front of a clause makes the clause grammatically subordinate: It cannot stand alone but depends on another clause to express a complete thought.

## Exercises

1. Transform this clause into a dependent clause by writing it with *because* in front.

the lions are hungry

2. Write a complex sentence by combining these clauses with the dependent clause first.

because the lions are hungry  
they are pacing restlessly in their cages

3. Transform this clause into a dependent clause by writing it with *unless* in front.

Aretha needs the car this afternoon

4. Write a complex sentence by combining these clauses with the dependent clause first.

unless Aretha needs the car this afternoon  
I would like to use it to take grandma shopping

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## SECTION 10.3 TWO PATTERNS FOR COMPLEX SENTENCES

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Here is the answer for one of the exercises.

Because the lions are hungry, they are pacing restlessly in their cages.

This answer illustrates one pattern for complex sentences.

Pattern I  
DEPENDENT CLAUSE followed by INDEPENDENT CLAUSE

Pattern I  
Because the lions are hungry, they are pacing restlessly in their cages.  
dependent clause                      independent clause

Complex sentences can also be written in another pattern.

### Pattern II

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE followed by DEPENDENT CLAUSE

### Pattern II

The lions are pacing restlessly in their cages because they are hungry.  
independent clause dependent clause

Note that there is no comma between the clauses in Pattern II. Note also that the subordinating conjunction (*because*) is no longer at the beginning of the sentence. However, *because* still introduces the cause.

*The lions are pacing restlessly in their cages* because *they are hungry*.  
result cause

### Sample Exercise

1. Use *because* to combine these sentences in Pattern II.

Cause: the air is becoming polluted

Result: some people are having breathing problems

### Answer Explanation

1. The conjunction *because* is written before the cause.

because the air is becoming polluted

2. In Pattern II, the independent clause is written first.

Some people are have breathing problems because the air is becoming polluted.  
independent clause dependent clause

### Exercise

Use *because* to combine these clauses in Pattern II.

Cause: it pays better than the day shift.

Result: my father voluntarily works the night shift at a factory

### Homework Assignment

Write a sentence using the conjunction *because* and Pattern II. Remember that for the homework assignment you are always welcome to copy a sentence from printed material if you cannot think of one yourself.

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## SECTION 10.4 USING *SINCE* TO EXPRESS CAUSE

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There are only seven coordinating conjunctions. But there are several dozen subordinating conjunctions, giving you more options for combining sentences and expressing relationships. A representative sample of subordinating conjunctions are presented in this chapter. The others are generally used in a similar way. Once you understand the main characteristics of subordinating conjunctions, you can master the others by observing how they are used in the materials that you read.

Some relationships are expressed by more than one subordinating conjunction. This allows you to choose the one that sounds best in a particular context. You know that *because* can be used for expressing a causal relationships. *Since* is a subordinating conjunction that can also be used to express a causal relationship. Here are two sentences that are identical except that *because* is used in one and *since* in the other.

Pete should go home now *because* we are almost done repairing the roof and his wife has the flu.

Pete should go home now *since* we are almost done repairing the roof and his wife has the flu.



### Exercise

Create a dependent clause by placing *before* in front of the later action. Then write a complex sentence with the independent clause first.

Later Action: he goes to school in the morning

Earlier Action: Ahmad delivers about 100 newspapers.

*As* can be used to indicate that two actions occurred at about the same time, with one being the setting or background for the other. *As* is placed in front of the clause describing the setting.

### Exercise

Create a dependent clause by placing *as* in front of the setting. Then write a complex sentence with the dependent clause first.

Setting: the police drove into the driveway

Main Action: the burglar jumped over the backyard fence

### Homework Assignment

Write a complex sentence that includes the word *while*, *as*, *before*, or *after*.

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## SECTION 10.6 WHY ONLY PATTERN I REQUIRES A COMMA

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Where would a comma be useful in this complex sentence?

After the family had eaten the children cleared the table.

A person reading this sentence might momentarily think that *the children* is the object of the verb *eaten*:

After the family had eaten the children

The reader might have to stop and mentally regroup the words to represent the correct meaning. Placing a comma at the end of the first clause prevents such confusion.

After the family had eaten, the children cleared the table.

However, when Pattern II is used, the conjunction separates the clauses, so a comma is not required.

The children cleared the table *after* the family had eaten.

This example illustrates why a comma is generally used in Pattern I but not in Pattern II. In Pattern II, the subordinating conjunction marks the border between the two clauses, so a comma is generally not needed. But in Pattern I, the comma separates the clauses and can help a reader sort out the ideas.

### Exercise

Create a dependent clause by placing *after* in front of the earlier action. Then write a complex sentence with the dependent clause first.

Earlier Action: the Wright brothers developed an effective rudder

Later Action: their plane flew without crashing

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## SECTION 10.7 THE CONDITIONAL CONJUNCTION *IF*

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The conjunction *if* is called a “conditional” subordinating conjunction because it introduces the “condition” under which an event can occur. The following exercise asks you to write a complex sentence with a dependent clause expressing such a condition.

### Exercise

Create a dependent clause by placing *if* in front of the condition. Then write a complex sentence with the dependent clause first.

Condition: the snow keeps falling

Main Event: school will be canceled tomorrow

Here is the answer for the last exercise.

If the snow keeps falling, school will be canceled tomorrow.

The first clause presents the condition under which the event described in the second clause will occur.

### Exercise

Create a dependent clause by placing *if* in front of the condition. Then write a complex sentence with the independent clause first.

Condition: you are finished with it

Main Event: I am going to throw out the newspaper

### Homework Assignment

Write a complex sentence that includes the conjunction *if*.

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## SECTION 10.8 USING MORE THAN ONE DEPENDENT CLAUSE

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Sometimes you can precede an independent clause with two dependent clauses. This pattern is shown in the following exercise.

### Exercise

Combine the three clauses below into one sentence as follows: Transform the first two clauses into two dependent clauses by preceding each with *if*. Join the dependent clauses with *and*. Place a comma after the two dependent clauses and end your combined sentence with the third clause.

it doesn't rain soon

the days continue to be so hot

our wheat crop will be ruined

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## SECTION 10.9 BUILDING TO A CLIMAX WITH THREE DEPENDENT CLAUSES

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Here is the answer for the last exercise.

If it does not rain soon and if the days continue to be so hot, our wheat crop will be ruined.

An engaging sentence can be created by preceding the main clause with three dependent clauses that present increasingly significant details about a topic. Such a sentence is illustrated in the next exercise.

### Exercise

Transform the first three clauses into three dependent clauses by preceding each with *if*. Then write a sentence that begins with the three dependent clauses (separated only by commas) and that ends with the fourth clause.

your story is developing well

the action and dialogue are moving towards the emotional core of your main characters

the stakes for winning or losing have been raised higher and higher

your readers will experience increasing excitement as the conflict reaches its peak

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## SECTION 10.10 USING *ALTHOUGH* TO EXPRESS A CONTRAST

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The conjunction *although* is used in expressing a contrast. However, *although* differs from other subordinating conjunctions in two ways. First, it can be placed in front of either clause, as illustrated by these sentences.

*Although* some people are starving, farms are producing a surplus of food.

Some people are starving, *although* farms are producing a surplus of food.

In a causal relationship, one clause describes the cause and the other the effect. So *because* can only be put in front of one of the clauses, the one presenting the cause. But with a contrast, each clause contrasts with the other one, so *although* can be placed in front of either.

The second unusual characteristic of *although* is that a comma is generally used even when the dependent clause comes after the independent clause because the comma accentuates the contrast.

While *although* can generally be written in front of either clause, a writer usually regards one clause as presenting background information and the other as expressing the main point. The conjunction *although* is placed in front of the background information.

### Exercise

Create a dependent clause by placing *although* in front of the background clause. Then write a complex sentence with the dependent clause first.

Background: Jack did not win the election

Main Point: he did receive enough votes to influence political decisions

### Homework Assignment

Write a complex sentence that includes the conjunction *although*.

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## SECTION 10.11 CONJUNCTIONS EXPRESSING MORE THAN ONE RELATIONSHIP

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Some subordinating conjunctions have two meanings. This is not unusual since many English words have more than one meaning. A *bug* is an insect, such as a ladybug, a bedbug, or a bug in a rug. However, “to bug” means “to pester.” It also means “to plant a microphone” for overhearing conversations and spying. The subordinating conjunction *since* can mean “because,” as illustrated earlier. But *since* can also mean “during the time from some event in the past,” as in the next sentence.

I have had a sore shoulder *since* I fell.

This meaning of *since* is illustrated again in the next exercise.

### Exercise

Create a dependent clause by placing *since* in front of the past event. Then write a complex sentence with the independent clause first.

Past Event: I was a sophomore in college

Subsequent Action: I have been drinking two cups of coffee for breakfast every morning

Another example of a subordinating conjunction with two meanings is *while*. One meaning (“during the time that”) was discussed earlier. A second meaning is “although.” The meaning of *while* that is intended by a writer in a particular sentence is generally clear from the context. Furthermore, having *while* as a synonym for *although* is at times a great convenience. For example, here is the beginning of a sentence from the last section.

While *although* can generally be written in front of either clause....

In this sentence, *while* means “although.” But if *although* did not have any synonyms, the sentence would have taken this form:

Although *although* can generally be written in front of either clause....

This repetition of *although* is awkward and a bit confusing. Having synonyms in a language contributes to the richness and effectiveness of the language.

### Exercise

Create a dependent clause by placing *while* in front of the background clause. Then write a complex sentence with the dependent clause first.

Background: computers are a great aid in data processing

Main Point: they also have great drawbacks, such as making a writer or researcher vulnerable to the possibility of losing huge quantities of important information in the blink of an eye.

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## SECTION 10.12 PLACING A DEPENDENT CLAUSE WITHIN AN INDEPENDENT CLAUSE

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Placing a dependent clause within an independent clause can be an effective way to emphasize ideas and lend variety to a series of sentences. A dependent clause placed within an independent clause is generally set off with commas, as illustrated in the following exercises.

### Sample Exercise

Write a complex sentence with the following dependent clause inserted after *is* in the independent clause and enclosed in commas.

Independent Clause: your essay is poorly organized and therefore difficult to understand

Dependent Clause: if you really want the truth

### Answer Explanation

1. The instructions say to insert the dependent clause after *is* in the independent clause. Here is the independent clause with *is* underlined.

your essay is poorly organized and therefore difficult to understand

2. The dependent clause is inserted after *is* and enclosed in commas.

Your essay is, *if you really want the truth*, poorly organized and therefore difficult to understand.

### Exercises

1. Rewrite these clauses as a complex sentence with the dependent clause inserted after *language* and set off with commas.

Independent Clause: the best way to learn a foreign language is to live for a while in a country where it is spoken

Dependent Clause: if you are not pressed for time or money

2. Rewrite this sentence with the dependent clause no longer in front but inserted right after *pears* in the independent clause.

When they have ripened to the peak of flavor, our pears are carefully picked by hand and individually wrapped for shipping.

### Homework Assignment

Write a sentence with a dependent clause within an independent clause. You can use the above examples and exercises as models.

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## SECTION 10.13 ELLIPTICAL CLAUSES

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The term *ellipsis* refers to omitting some words from a sentence. If a dependent clause positioned before the independent clause in a complex sentence has the same subject as the independent clause, and if its main verb is *be* or contains *be* as a helping verb, then the *subject* and *be* can be omitted. Such an omission is illustrated in the following exercise.

### Exercise

Rewrite this sentence with the subject (*she*) and the form of *be* (*was*) deleted from the dependent clause.

While she was sitting in the library reading a professional journal, Sonia suddenly saw how she could solve a problem that had been plaguing her research for months.

Here is the answer for the last exercise.

While sitting in the library reading a professional journal, Sonia suddenly saw how she could solve a problem that had been plaguing her research for months.

The dependent clause in this sentence is called an elliptical clause because some words have been omitted. Elliptical clauses cannot be formed with all subordinating conjunctions. Here are some of the conjunctions that do permit omission of the subject and *be*: *when*, *while*, *if*, *unless*, *although*, and *until*.

### Exercises

Rewrite each sentence with the subject and *be* omitted from the dependent clause.

1. When he is busy with customers, our manager does not like us to bother him with personal questions, such as whether we can switch shifts.
2. My father, although he was hungry and exhausted, insisted on finishing the repairs on the garage roof last night.

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## SECTION 10.14 AVOIDING DANGLING ELLIPTICAL CLAUSES

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How might the following sentence be misinterpreted?

While shopping at the supermarket, two stray dogs jumped up on the meat counter and started tearing open packages of steak.

Were the stray dogs shopping at the supermarket? That is what the sentence seems to say. The problem is that the true (but omitted) subject of the dependent clause is not the same as the subject of the independent clause. The result is what grammarians call a dangling elliptical clause.

One way to correct a dangling elliptical clause is to rewrite the clause with an appropriate subject and verb. For example, *we were* can be added to the above sentence.

While *we were* shopping at the supermarket, two stray dogs jumped up on the meat counter and started tearing open packages of steak.

### Exercises

1. According to the following sentence, who was only three years old when he joined the army? Answer:

When only three years old, John's father joined the army and was stationed in Panama.

2. Rewrite this sentence with *John was* inserted after *when* and *John's* replaced by *his*.

When only three years old, John's father joined the army and was stationed in Panama.

Here is the answer for the last exercise.

When John was only three years old, his father joined the army and was stationed in Panama.

Note that the subject of the dependent clause (*John*) is not the same as the subject of the independent clause (*father*). As long as the subject of a dependent clause is not deleted to form an elliptical clause, it need not be the same as the subject of an independent clause. But it can only be deleted if it is the same. The following exercise shows that the subject of a dependent clause can be unrelated to the subject of the independent clause, so long as it is not omitted.

### Exercises

1. Rewrite this sentence with *Harry Truman was* inserted after *when*.

When only three years old, John's father joined the navy and was stationed in Europe.

2. According to the following sentence, what was eating at a restaurant when it began to ring? Answer:

While eating at a restaurant, the fire alarm began to ring and would not stop.

3. Rewrite this sentence with *we were* inserted after *while*.

While eating at a restaurant, the fire alarm began to ring and would not stop.

### Homework Assignment

Write a sentence with a dangling elliptical clause. Use the above examples and exercises as models.

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