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CHAPTER 21

Using That-Clauses as Subjects, Objects, and Modifiers

SECTION 21.1 INTRODUCTION

The subjects of the sentences that you wrote in all of the previous chapters are nouns. Some of the nouns are modified, making the subjects lengthy and rich with information. Still, the main word in each subject is a noun. In this chapter we begin looking at other grammatical structures that can be used as subjects, structures that present more information than a noun alone can carry. Furthermore, the grammatical structures we will discuss can be used not only as subjects but also as objects and modifiers. These structures add enormously to the amount of information that a sentence can present.

SECTION 21.2 USING *THAT*-CLAUSES IN SUBJECT SLOTS

You know that the subject of a sentence is generally a noun, as in this sentence.

The marriage pleased both my parents.

↗
subject

However, here is a sentence which has an entire clause for a subject.

Clause
That Flo married Barry pleased both my parents.
subject

Exercises

For each exercise, create a *that*-clause from the second sentence by adding *that* in front. Then rewrite the first sentence with the words NOUN CLAUSE replaced by the *that*-clause you created.

1. NOUN CLAUSE makes my father extremely happy and proud, which has a positive effect on the entire family.
My brother Tommy is the best high school halfback in the city.
2. NOUN CLAUSE was becoming clear to the mayor as well as the voters, who did not want their taxes raised.
More money had to be raised before the city could build a new baseball stadium.

Homework Assignment

Write a sentence which has a *that*-clause as its subject.

SECTION 21.3 USING THE FACT THAT

Sometimes placing *that* before a clause produces a *that*-clause which sounds somewhat awkward when used as a subject. An alternative is to place *the fact that* before the clause. The resulting dependent clause generally sounds smoother when used as the subject of a sentence.

Sample Exercise

Create a dependent clause from the second sentence by placing *the fact that* in front. Then rewrite the first sentence with the words NOUN CLAUSE replaced by the dependent clause you created.

NOUN CLAUSE should not disturb you because everyone reports the same problem, and Dave Barry even wrote a newspaper column about it.

You regularly receive unwarranted error messages from your Windows software.

Answer Explanation

1. Here is the second sentence with *the fact that* in front.

the fact that you regularly receive unwarranted error messages from your Windows software

2. This dependent clause replaces NOUN CLAUSE in the first sentence.

The fact that you regularly receive unwarranted error messages from your Windows software should not disturb you because everyone reports the same problem, and Dave Barry even wrote a newspaper column about it.

Here is the same sentence with just *that* in front. Read it and decide which sentence you like better, the one with just *that* or the one with *the fact that*.

That you regularly receive unwarranted error messages from your Windows software should not disturb you because everyone reports the same problem, and Dave Barry even wrote a newspaper column about it.

Just as *though* and *although* have the same meaning (they are synonyms), *that* and *the fact that* mean the same thing when used in front of a clause filling the subject slot of a sentence. Which you use depends on which sounds better in a particular context.

2. Although Tyrone's job required him to move to Louisiana, he still believes NOUN CLAUSE.
California is the best place to live.
3. Alice complained NOUN CLAUSE, but the landlord did nothing to fix it.
The sink was leaking.
4. The young actor realizes NOUN CLAUSE, but he wants a plastic surgeon to make his nose a little smaller and his jaw a little larger.
Any type of surgery involves risks.

Homework Assignment

Write a sentence which has a *that*-clause as its object.

SECTION 21.5 OMITTING *THAT* FROM A *THAT*-CLAUSE OBJECT

When a *that*-clause is the object in a sentence, the word *that* may sometimes be omitted. For example, here is part of the answer for the last exercise.

The young actor realizes *that* any type of surgery involves risks.

This sentence can be written without *that*.

The young actor realizes any type of surgery involves risks.

However, *that* cannot be deleted if the noun clause is the subject of the sentence. For example, here is the answer to another of the earlier exercises.

That Lester won the race surprised everyone except Lester.

That cannot be deleted because the noun clause is the subject:

Lester won the race surprised everyone except Lester.

Also, *that* should not be deleted from the object if doing so could lead to momentary confusion or misinterpretation. Consider this sentence.

Don believes that all salesmen are dishonest.

Here is the sentence with *that* deleted.

Don believes all salesmen are dishonest.

As a reader begins the sentence, he could misinterpret the first four words to mean the opposite of what the writer intends the sentence to say:

Don believes all salesmen

This misinterpretation would have to be corrected when the reader reached the end of the sentence. Therefore, *that* should not be omitted from such a sentence.

Exercises

Rewrite the first sentence with the second sentence used as a noun clause serving as the object of the verb. Omit the connector *that*.

1. Columbus believed NOUN CLAUSE.
He had reached India by sailing almost completely around the Earth.
2. My wife knows NOUN CLAUSE.
I will always remember our anniversary.

Homework Assignment

Write a sentence which has a *that*-clause as an object. Then cross out *that*. Finally, check to be sure that the sentence still reads smoothly and cannot lead to momentary confusion.

SECTION 21.6 USING A *THAT*-CLAUSE TO MODIFY AN ADJECTIVE

That-clauses are not used only in noun slots of sentences. They are also used to modify adjectives. Here is a sentence with the adjective *unhappy*.

Martin is *unhappy*.
 ↗
 adjective

The next sentence explains why Martin is unhappy.

His girlfriend is leaving for Spain to study engineering for a year.

This sentence can be transformed into a *that*-clause by writing *that* in front.

that his girlfriend is leaving for Spain to study engineering for a year

This *that*-clause can now be written after *unhappy* in the sentence above.

Martin is unhappy that his girlfriend is leaving for Spain to study engineering for a year.

Exercises

In each exercise, rewrite the first sentence with a *that*-clause created from the second sentence placed right after the underlined adjective.

1. Ruben is sure.

The storm will destroy our beach cottage.

2. Jack is grateful, and he wants you to accept this check as a token of his appreciation.

You helped him learn Spanish.

3. Thankful, Adam hugged his mother and little brother and could not help crying with relief.

They had escaped from the fire uninjured.

4. Knowing, Yolanda conscientiously completes all the exercises in her grammar workbook.

Writing skills are important in obtaining a good job.

Homework Assignment

Write a sentence with an adjective modified by a *that*-clause. You can use your answers to the above exercises as models.

SECTION 21.7 USING A *SO . . . THAT* STRUCTURE AS AN INTENSIFIER

Recall from the adverb chapter that *very* is an intensifier which can be used to modify adjectives and adverbs. Instead of just saying, “Bob is happy,” we may say, “Bob is *very* happy.” A *so . . . that* structure can also be used as an intensifier to modify an adjective or adverb. Here is a sentence with the adjective *severe*.

The storm was *severe*.

In the next sentence, the adjective *severe* is modified by a *so . . . that* structure.

The storm was *so* severe *that* we did not even try to leave the house.

Note that *so* is placed right before the adjective *severe*. The *that*-clause is placed at the end of the sentence. Note the three dots in *so . . . that*. Such dots indicate that one or more words belong in this position. In the above example, *severe* occupies this position:

so severe that

Sometimes more than one word is placed between *so* and *that*. Words related to the adjective or adverb may be included in this position, as illustrated by the following exercise.

Sample Exercise

Rewrite the first sentence with *so* inserted before *grateful* and a *that*-clause formed from the second sentence written at the end.

The quarterback of the Broncos is *grateful* for everything his high school coach taught him.

He visits the coach every year and gives the coach's current team an inspirational talk.

Answer Explanation

1. *So* is inserted before *grateful*.

The quarterback of the Broncos is *so* grateful for everything his

2. *That* is written in front of the second sentence.

that he visits the coach every year and gives the coach's

3. The *that*-clause is placed at the end of the first sentence.

The quarterback of the Broncos is *so* grateful for everything his high school coach taught him *that he visits the coach every year and gives the coach's current team an inspirational talk*.

Note: The *that*-clause in a *so . . . that* structure does not occupy the position of a noun in a sentence. Therefore, it is not a noun clause. Instead, *so . . . that* is a special grammatical structure which plays a role similar to the intensifiers discussed in **Chapter 5**.

Exercises

In each exercise, rewrite the first sentence with *so* inserted before the underlined adjective and with a *that*-clause formed from the second sentence written at the end.

1. The parking problem in Manhattan is acute.

Very few people drive their cars to work.

2. The air in Dallas is sometimes bad for people with respiratory problems.

They are advised to remain at home with the windows closed.

3. The salary of police officers in Duran County is low compared to salaries in surrounding counties.

Some officers are resigning and taking jobs with police departments elsewhere.

4. The mayor has displeased many private citizens and public officials.

Impeachment proceedings are being threatened.

Homework Assignment

Write a sentence with an adjective modified by a *so . . . that* structure.

SECTION 21.8 OVERVIEW: THE THREE *THATS*

In this chapter you used the word *that*. You also used *that* in the chapters on demonstrative pronouns and relative clauses. However, the three *that*'s are unrelated. There are many words which have more than one meaning. Turkey is a traditional Thanksgiving meal. Turkey is also a country in Southeast Europe. But the people of Turkey are not known for eating or raising turkeys. The fact that the same word names a country and a bird does not mean that the two are in any way related. The same is true for *that* used as a demonstrative pronoun, *that* used as a relative pronoun, and *that* used for turning independent clauses into *that*-clauses. Three different meanings of the word *that* are involved, and you now have experience in constructing sentences using *that* with each of its meanings.

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