

Tikrit University



College of Education for Humanities

Department of English

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Noun Clause

Lecturer: Waqas Saadi Ismael (PhD)

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A **noun clause** is often part of an independent clause, where it can be a subject or an object.

There are three kinds of noun clauses:

1. *That* clauses, which begin with the word ***that***
2. *If / Whether* clauses, which begin with the words ***whether*** or ***if***
3. Question clauses, which begin with a question word, such as ***who***, ***what***, ***where***, ***when***, or ***how***

Punctuating Noun Clauses

- NEVER use a comma to separate a noun clause from the independent clause.

I am sure **that** the address is correct.

- If the independent clause is a statement, put a period at the end of the entire sentence.

If the independent clause is a question, put a question mark at the end of the entire sentence.

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE	NOUN CLAUSE
I am sure	that the address is correct.
Are you sure	that the address is correct?

THAT CLAUSES

A ***that*** clause is a dependent noun clause that begins with the word ***that***.

The young filmmaker hopes **that** his film will be a financial success.

You can sometimes omit **that** if the meaning is clear without it. However, you can never omit **that** when it is the first word in a sentence.

CORRECT	The young filmmaker hopes that his film will be a financial success.
CORRECT	The young filmmaker hopes his film will be a financial success.
CORRECT	That his film is a critical success is beyond doubt.
INCORRECT	His film is a critical success is beyond doubt.

A ***that*** clause can appear in different locations.

- **After the independent clause verb.** The most common position of a noun clause is after the verb of the independent clause, where it functions as the object of that verb.

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE

NOUN CLAUSE (OBJECT)

S V
↓ ↓
The catalog states **that** science courses require a laboratory period.

- **After certain adjectives.** A that clause can also follow certain adjectives such as happy, glad, proud, pleased, sad, upset, worried, sorry, certain, surprised, and sure. INDEPENDENT CLAUSE NOUN CLAUSE ADJECTIVE
The class was surprised that the instructor canceled the final exam.

- **After certain nouns.** A that clause can follow certain nouns such as idea, theory, thought, claim, assertion, statement, belief, notion, and opinion. INDEPENDENT CLAUSE NOUN CLAUSE NOUN
No one believed Galileo's theory that Earth revolves around the sun.

- **At the beginning of a sentence.** A that clause at the beginning of a sentence functions as the subject of the independent clause verb. INDEPENDENT CLAUSE NOUN CLAUSE (SUBJECT)
That Earth is getting warmer is certain.

SENTENCES BEGINNING WITH *IT*

Starting a sentence with a noun clause seems awkward to many English speakers, so they often rewrite such sentences by putting ***It*** at the beginning and moving the noun clause to the end.

AWKWARD **That Earth is getting warmer** is certain.

BETTER **It** is certain **that Earth is getting warmer**.

In addition, the verb following **It** (except **be** or any intransitive verb like *seem* or *appear*) is often written in the passive voice, especially in academic writing.

It is believed that carbon dioxide is responsible for global warming.

It was agreed that the meeting would be postponed until next week.

It has been proven that the world's deserts are expanding.

You can also write these sentences in the active voice:

Many scientists believe that carbon dioxide is responsible for global warming.

The participants agreed that the meeting would be postponed until next week.

Measurements have proven that the world's deserts are expanding.

Active and Passive Voice

In general, English writers prefer the active voice because it is more direct. However, the passive voice is preferred in five specific situations.

RULES	EXAMPLES
1. The emphasis is on what happened, not who did it	Jack was promoted last month.
2. The performer of the action is unknown.	The wheel was invented during the Bronze Age.
3. The performer of the action is unimportant	Smoking is prohibited on airplanes.
4. Content is objective, as in a scientific or technical report	Three ml of HCl were added to the test tube.
5. Statement is diplomatic; it does not say who did something wrong or made an error.	I believe a mistake has been made on our bill.

SPECIAL VERB TENSES IN THAT CLAUSES

Some kinds of **that** clauses require special verb tenses. These kinds of **that** clauses are called reported speech and subjunctive noun clauses.

Reported Speech

One of the most common uses of noun clauses in academic writing is to report what someone else has said or written. This kind of noun clause is called **reported speech**. Sometimes it is also called indirect speech or indirect quotation.

Verb tenses in reported speech follow special rules.

- If the independent clause verb is in the simple present, present perfect, or future, the verb in the noun clause is in the tense that expresses the meaning that the independent clause intends.

The prime ministers **agree** that global warming **is** a serious world problem.

They **hope** that all nations **will be** responsible for solving this problem.

Scientists **report** that atmospheric warming **has** already **begun**.

Measurements **have indicated** that the average temperature of Earth **was** lower 100 years ago.

Further research **will prove** that carbon dioxide **is** largely responsible.

- If the independent clause verb is in the past tense, the verb in the noun clause is usually in a past form.

The prime ministers **agreed** that global warming **was** a serious world problem.

They **hoped** that all nations **would be** responsible for finding a solution.

An international group of scientists **reported** that Earth's temperature **had risen** 1.1 degrees Fahrenheit (0.6°C) in the last century.

Their report **stated** that carbon dioxide **was** largely responsible.

Exception: The verb in the noun clause stays in the present tense when it reports a fact or a general truth:

Researchers in the field **verified** that icebergs and glaciers **are** melting.

Subjunctive Noun Clauses

After certain verbs and adjectives in independent clauses, you must use the **subjunctive form** of the verb in the noun clause that follows. The subjunctive form of a verb is the same as the base form—for example, *be, go, come, do*.

VERBS			Adjectives	
advise	insist	request	advisable	mandatory
ask	order	require	desirable	necessary
command	prefer	suggest	essential	urgent
demand	propose	urge	important	vital
direct	recommend			

The verbs and adjectives that require the subjunctive form in the noun clauses that follow indicate urgency, advisability, necessity, and desirability.

The company president **urged** that the marketing department **be** more aggressive. It is **necessary** that each salesperson **work** longer hours.

Make a subjunctive verb negative by putting the word *not* in front of *it*.

She **insisted** that the company **not lose** any more customers to its competitors.

The subjunctive also occurs when the independent clause verb is in the passive voice.

It was recommended that the department **not hire** new staff at this time.

IF / WHETHER CLAUSES

An *if* / *whether* clause is dependent noun clause that begins with the subordinator *if* or *Whether*. *Whether* is more formal than *if*. The optional phrase *or not* may be added in two places with *whether* and in one place with *if*. Therefore, there are five possible patterns:

The patient wants to know **whether Dr. Chen practices acupuncture**.

The patient wants to know **whether or not Dr. Chen practices acupuncture**.

The patient wants to know **whether Dr. Chen practices acupuncture or not**.

The patient wants to know **if Dr. Chen practices acupuncture**.

The patient wants to know **if Dr. Chen practices acupuncture or not**.

Notice that *if/whether* clauses are statements, not questions, even though they are made from *yes / no* questions (questions that can be answered *yes* or *no*). *If / Whether* clauses use statement word order (subject-verb) and do not contain *do*, *does*, or *did*.

To change a question into an *if / whether* clause, add a subordinator (*if* or *whether*), change the word order to statement word order, and delete *do*, *does*, and *did* if necessary.

QUESTION	SENTENCE WITH <i>IF / WHETHER</i> CLAUSE
Is the test easy?	The students want to know if is the test easy
Does he know the answer?	I want to know whether does he know, the answer

Follow the sequence of tenses rules if necessary. (If the independent clause verb is in a past tense, the verb in the noun clause should also be in a past tense.)

was
John asked if the test-**is**-hard.

QUESTION CLAUSES

A question clause is a dependent noun clause that begins with a subordinator such as who, what, when, where, why, how, how much, how long, and so on. There are two possible patterns. In the first pattern, the subordinator is the subject of the clause.

SUBJECT / SUBORD. V

The police do not know **who** committed the robbery.

In the second pattern, the subordinator is not the subject of the clause.

SUBORD. SUBJECT

The police do not know **when** the robbery happened.

Notice that the word order in question clauses is statement order (subject + verb), not question order (verb + subject). Also, question clauses do not contain do, does, or did because they are not questions even though they begin with a question word.