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Subordinating Conjunctions

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WHAT IS A CONJUNCTION?

A **conjunction** is a word that is used to connect elements of a sentence, such as words, phrases, or clauses. There are three types of conjunctions: subordinating conjunctions, coordinating conjunctions, and correlative conjunctions. **Subordinating conjunctions** form sentences into word clusters called subordinate or dependent clauses, which serve as parts of sentences. Dependent clauses cannot stand alone and must be connected to independent clauses to form complex sentences.

A **subordinating conjunction** is a word or phrase that links a dependent clause to an independent clause. This word or phrase indicates that a clause has informative value to add to the sentence's main idea, signaling a cause-and-effect relationship or a shift in time and place between the two clauses.

Subordinating conjunctions showing cause and effect

The subordinating conjunction that is simplest to explain is *because*. *Because* is a conjunction with just one purpose: to show a cause-and-effect relationship between a subordinate clause and a main clause. On its own, a clause beginning with *because* is incomplete.

Example: Because he wouldn't wear a seat belt.

We have the sense that there is something missing here. Let's add an independent clause so this statement has something to lean on.

Example: Robin wasn't allowed in the Batmobile any longer.

Now we will combine the two in a complex sentence.

Example: Robin wasn't allowed in the Batmobile any longer because he wouldn't wear a seat belt.

In this sentence, "Robin wasn't allowed in the Batmobile any longer" is an independent clause. It could stand on its own as a complete sentence. A clause that shows a causal relationship, such as "because he wouldn't wear a seat belt" (answering the question "Why?" or "For what purpose?"), is often referred to as a *clause of purpose*.

Other subordinating conjunctions that can show cause-and-effect relationships and function in the same way are **for, as, since, though, due to, provided that, because of, unless,** and **so/so that**.

Example: Batman required strict compliance with seat belt rules, hence Robin was not allowed to ride in the Batmobile.

Example: Since Robin refused to wear his seat belt, Batman has banned him from the Batmobile.

Subordinating conjunctions signaling relationships of time or place

Another function of subordinating conjunctions is to show a relationship between two clauses involving a transition of time or place. Some examples of such subordinating conjunctions are **once, while, when, whenever, where, wherever, before, and after**.

Example: Once Batman learned that Robin had not been wearing his seat belt, he took away his keys to the Bat mobile.

Example: Robin looked regretfully at the Bat mobile whenever he passed it in the Bat cave.

Example: After Batman was done working for the night, Robin took a secret ride in the Bat mobile.

Example: Before Robin gets his job in the Bat cave back, he must promise to stop playing with the Bat mobile.

Comma placement and subordinating conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions that fall in the middle of a sentence are generally not preceded by a comma. This is the opposite of what is done with coordinating conjunctions, or words that join two independent clauses (**for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and sometimes so**). When a subordinate clause begins a sentence, however, the whole clause (but not the subordinating conjunction itself) is followed by a comma.

Incorrect: Whenever, Batman was away, Robin drove the Bat mobile.

Correct: Whenever Batman was away, Robin drove the Bat mobile.

Incorrect: Robin drove the Batmobile, whenever Batman was away.

Correct: Robin drove the Batmobile whenever Batman was away.

A handy list of subordinating conjunctions

- after
- although
- as
- as if
- as long as
- as much as
- as soon as
- as though
- because
- before
- by the time
- even if
- even though
- if

- in case
- in order that
- in the event that
- lest
- now that
- once
- only
- only if
- provided that
- since
- so
- supposing
- than
- that
- though
- till
- unless
- until

- when
- whenever
- where
- whereas
- wherever
- whether or not
- while

Subordinating conjunction questions

What are subordinating conjunctions?

Subordinating conjunctions are words and phrases that connect dependent clauses to independent clauses. They usually show a cause-and-effect relationship or a shift in time or place.

What are examples of subordinating conjunctions?

We can't go to the mall because our car broke down.

Whenever I'm in Philadelphia, I always get a cheesesteak.

How do you use subordinating conjunctions in a sentence?

Place subordinating conjunctions at the beginning of the dependent clause. If the dependent clause comes before the independent clause, put a comma at the end of the dependent clause.

Can subordinating conjunctions start a sentence?

Subordinating conjunctions often start a sentence whenever the dependent clause comes first.