

Subordinators

Explanation

Like coordinators (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), **subordinators** (see chart below) can join **independent clauses**, aka simple sentences, and can help you:

Connections

See also the “Coordinators” and “Fragments” handouts.

- Make your writing more fluid by connecting short sentences
- Make your writing more precise by showing your reader the logical relationships between ideas.

Let’s take a look at some of the most common subordinators. As you can see from the sample sentences below, subordinators can appear either at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence.

Logical Relationship	Subordinators	Sample Sentence
Contrast/ Concession	although, while, even though, even if, whereas, though	Although the young blond heiress was often in the news, she had no talent.
Cause	because, since	He started to worry about finding a job because he was almost finished with his last semester of college.
Effect/ Result	so that, in that, in order that	She enrolled in cooking school so that she could become a pastry chef.
Condition	if, unless, provided that	If it is sunny this weekend, they are planning to have a barbeque.
Time	after, before, as soon as, since, when, while, until, as	Until my brother pays me back for last time, I am not lending him any more money.

Subordinators & Dependent Clauses (aka Subordinate Clauses)

Joining two independent clauses with a subordinator transforms one of them—the one which begins with the subordinator—into a dependent clause. Even though this clause will still contain a subject-verb unit, it cannot stand alone as a sentence.

Independent Clause (a complete sentence)	Dependent clause (no longer a complete sentence)
The young blond <u>heiress</u> <u>was</u> often in the news.	<i>Although</i> the young blond <u>heiress</u> <u>was</u> often in the news
<u>He</u> <u>was</u> almost <u>finished</u> with his last semester of college.	<i>Because</i> <u>he</u> <u>was</u> almost <u>finished</u> with his last semester of college

Dependent clauses pretending to be sentences are actually **fragments**, a grammar error you can read more about on the “Fragments” handout.

Subordinators & Emphasis

Unlike coordinators, subordinators do not give equal emphasis to the ideas they connect; instead, the clause that begins with a subordinator—the dependent clause— receives less emphasis. Compare the following two sentences:

- Although he wanted to see the movie, Guillermo did not want to spend ten dollars.
- Although he did not want to spend ten dollars, Guillermo wanted to see the movie.

In the first sentence, the subordinator “although” de-emphasizes Guillermo’s desire to see the movie; his reluctance to spend the money seems more important. In the second sentence, however, the subordinator “although” de-emphasizes Guillermo’s reluctance to spend the money, and his desire to see the movie seems more important.

Be careful, then, when deciding where to place the subordinator—this placement can change the meaning of your sentence.

Punctuation

When a subordinator introduces a sentence, put a comma after the first clause.

- *After* she went to bed, she started to hear noises downstairs.

But if the subordinator comes in the middle of a clause, you don’t need to set it off with a comma.

- She started to hear noises downstairs *after* she went to bed.

Exercises

A) Join the following sentences using an appropriate subordinator. For the first four sets of sentences, you'll see a hint about the logical relationship you should show.

For example: Some rodents and birds prey on cockroaches.

Man is their biggest foe. [CONTRAST]

While some rodents and birds prey on cockroaches, man is their biggest foe.

1. Cockroaches are a health menace to humans.
They carry viruses and bacteria that result in diseases from hepatitis to salmonella.
[CAUSE]
2. Humans try to defeat cockroaches.
Cockroaches are very successful at surviving our attacks. [CAUSE]
3. Cockroaches are smaller than the humans who chase them.
They have extremely fast responses and sensitive receptors.
[CONTRAST/CONCESSION]
4. There is no food.
Cockroaches subsist on glue, paper, and soap. [TIME]
5. They can't find glue, paper or soap.
They can draw on their body stores for three months.
6. Cockroaches are really desperate.
They will turn into cannibals.
7. Female Suriname cockroaches produce generation after generation of identical females.
They are able to clone themselves.

B) Join the following sentences with subordinators, making sure the word you choose indicates the appropriate logical connection between ideas.

1. They sat down with Red Cloud to discuss the purchase of the Black Hills. Whatever calmness the government commissioners still possessed must have been shaken.
2. Red Cloud calmly proposed that \$600 million seemed like a fair price. The region was so valuable to the Native Americans and appeared even more valuable to the commissioners.
3. The Native Americans had reconsidered their price tag. They suggested that \$6 million would be a reasonable offer.
4. The commissioners were too intimidated to negotiate. They returned to Washington and angrily recommended teaching the Native Americans a lesson.
5. The government immediately ordered all Native Americans to come onto the reservation at once. The demand was both illegal and impossible to comply with.
6. Most of the Native Americans could never know about the order. They were spread out all over the Black Hills.
7. The deadline came. Only one small band of Native Americans had come in.
8. The other Native Americans were now assumed at war with the government. The Indian Bureau turned the matter over to General Philip Sheridan.
9. It was a totally unprovoked war. No Sioux or Cheyenne had ever violated a treaty or actually attacked a U.S. citizen.