

SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

A subordinate or “dependent” clause will begin with a conjunction (e.g. *because, after, since, whether, while*) or a pronoun (e.g. *that, who, which*). This combination of words will not form a complete sentence. It will instead make a reader want more information to finish the thought.

Correctly attaching a subordinate clause to a main clause:

When you attach a subordinate clause **in front of** a main clause, use a comma, like this:

Subordinate Clause + [comma] + Main Clause

- *Even though the broccoli was covered in cheddar cheese, Emily refused to eat it.*
- *While Bailey slept on the sofa in front of the television, Samson, the family dog, gnawed on the leg of the coffee table.*

When you attach a subordinate clause **at the end** of a main clause, you should generally use no punctuation, like this:

Main Clause + [no punctuation] + Subordinate Clause

- *Jonathan woke up late today [no punctuation] because he was outside stargazing until 2 AM.*
- *Diane decided to plant tomatoes in the back of the yard [no punctuation] where the sun blazed the longest during the day.*

Using subordination to combine ideas effectively:

Writers use subordination to combine two ideas in a single sentence. Here are two short sentences:

- *Esther gasped. A six-foot snake slithered across the sidewalk.*

Since the two sentences are related, you can combine them to express the action more effectively:

- *Esther gasped when a six-foot snake slithered across the sidewalk.*

If the two ideas have unequal importance, save the most important one for the end of the sentence so that your reader remembers it best. Observe that if we rewrite the example above so that the two ideas are flipped, the wrong point gets emphasized:

- *When a six-foot snake slithered across the sidewalk, Esther gasped.*

This rewritten sentence emphasizes Esther’s gasp rather than the presence of a giant snake on the sidewalk. It is also confusing to read, because it dulls the impact of both clauses.

Credit: Adapted from “The Subordinate Clause,” *Chomp Chomp*. 24 October 2017, <http://www.chompchomp.com/terms/subordinateclause.htm>.

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