Clauses II:
Common Types of Clauses

In the Writing Center handout “Clauses I,” clauses are explained in simple terms (independent and dependent clauses). This follow-up handout will show more complex applications of dependent clauses, such as being able to identify and properly use **noun, adverb, adjective,** and **elliptical clauses.** For information about restrictive and nonrestrictive dependent clauses, please refer to the Writing Center handout “Clauses III.”

As mentioned in “Clauses I,” a **dependent clause** (subordinate clause) also contains a subject and a verb, but the meaning is incomplete, such as in the clause: **“when the ice melted”**. What happened **when** the ice melted? A dependent clause cannot stand alone as a complete sentence and therefore must be connected with an independent clause. There are three main types of dependent clauses: **noun, adjective,** and **adverb** clauses. When identifying dependent clauses, look for these keywords:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>that</th>
<th>what</th>
<th>how many</th>
<th>although</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>whether</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>how far</td>
<td>as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who</td>
<td>when</td>
<td>how long</td>
<td>because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whom</td>
<td>why</td>
<td>how often</td>
<td>everywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whose</td>
<td>how</td>
<td>how soon</td>
<td>if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which</td>
<td>how much</td>
<td>after</td>
<td>so</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Noun Clauses**

A noun clause (also called a nominal clause) is a dependent clause that acts like a noun because it can function as a **subject**, **object of a verb**, or **object of a preposition**.

Typically, noun clauses begin with one of the aforementioned keywords such as *who*, *what*, *whether*, and *that*.

**Examples of noun clauses:**

- whether it will rain
- when I arrived
- what they said

As stated above, all dependent clauses must be attached to an independent clause to form a complete sentence:

- I do not know *whether it will rain*.
- The sun was out *when I arrived*.
- *What they said* is none of your business.

**Forms of Noun Clauses**

As previously mentioned, a noun (or nominal) clause functions as a noun—a person, place, thing, or idea. This means that it can be the **subject**, **object**, **object of a preposition**, or **predicate nominative** of a sentence.

**Subject:**
A subject is the person, place, thing, or idea that the sentence is about. Noun clauses can often act as the subject of a sentence.

**For example:**

- *How to tie shoelaces* is a difficult lesson to teach a four-year-old.
- *What I learned in school today* was enlightening.
**Object:**
An object is what is acted upon by the verb in a sentence. Noun clauses can often act as the object of a sentence.

**For example:**

She knows how much money we need.
I wonder whose book it is.

**Object of a Preposition:**
A noun clause that acts as the object of a preposition is a clause that follows a preposition (i.e., to, of, at, in, on, for, among, about, etcetera.)

**For example:**

The teacher gave an explanation of how to use nominal clauses.
The family hasn’t decided on where they are going for vacation.

**Predicate Nominative:**
A clause that acts as a predicate nominative follows a linking verb, which is a verb that expresses the state of being or condition of a subject. For example, in the sentence “Samantha is funny”, the linking verb is is followed by the adjective funny. Instead of being used to express an action, linking verbs describe the subject.

**For example:**

Valley College is where we go to school.
The decision was whether we should do our homework now or later.

**Adjective Clauses**
An adjective clause (also called an adjectival/relative clause) is a dependent clause that acts like an adjective because it provides extra information about the
noun or pronoun it follows. Just like noun clauses, adjective clauses typically begin with one of the aforementioned keywords.

**Examples of adjective clauses:**

- who was smiling
- that he dislikes
- where you live

In a complete sentence, these clauses modify or provide extra information about a noun:

- Amy, *who was smiling*, said hello. (Modifies “Amy”)
- John does not want to attend a class *that he dislikes*. (Modifies “class”)
- The city *where you live* is beautiful. (Modifies “city”)

**Adverb Clauses**

An *adverb clause* (also called an adverbial clause) gives details about how an action is performed.

**Examples of adverb clauses:**

- while he spoke
- because you got an A
- if she drives a car

When used in a complete sentence, adverb clauses answer questions such as *when, where, why, and how* an action was performed. It can also express a condition, contrast, purpose, or result of an action.
We listened while he spoke.
(Describes when we “listened”)  

We will celebrate because you got an A.
(Describes why we “celebrate”)  

If she drives a car, she must have a license.
(Expresses a condition in order to “drive”)  

**Elliptical Clauses**

An **elliptical clause** is a clause in which some words are left out. It can be independent or dependent. The missing words are understood and are therefore unnecessary or superfluous.

**Examples of dependent elliptical clauses:**

Bella liked the color red; Evan, green.
[Bella liked the color red; Evan {liked the color} green.]

The comma in the second clause stands in for the words “liked the color”; these words are unnecessary because the meaning is clear from the context given by the first clause.

Commas are not always needed for elliptical clauses:

I am better at English than science.
[I am better at English than {I am at} science.]

**Examples of independent elliptical clauses:**

The teacher knew the students weren’t listening.
[The teacher knew {that} the students weren’t listening.]

The word “that” is unnecessary in this clause because it is implied; it is understood from the context.

We found a nice restaurant, located in Los Angeles.
We found a nice restaurant, {which was} located in Los Angeles.
Exercises

1. Underline the noun clause in the following sentences. Does the noun clause represent the subject, object, object of a preposition, or predicate nominative of the sentence?

The question is whether or not you want to buy it. ______________________________

I wonder why she doesn’t talk much. ______________________________

She is headed to where she needs to go. ______________________________

What you want to do seems dangerous. ______________________________

The reason we can’t go is that we don’t have time. ______________________________

2. What words are missing from the elliptical clause?

I’m sure ______________________________ we should study.

He has a cat ______________________________ called Oscar.

Adam wants a jacket; Erin ______________________________ shoes.

The volume of my stereo is louder than ______________________________ yours.

For answers to these exercises, please consult with a Writing Center tutor.

This handout is based on the following sources:


For further reference, see the following books:

All of the above texts are available in the Writing Center. For more information, please visit our website at http://www.lavc.edu/writingcenter/

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