DEPENDENT CLAUSES

All sentences consist of one or more clauses. A clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb. Some clauses are independent while others are dependent, and for a sentence to be complete, it must contain at least one independent clause. (For more information, see the Sentence Structure Basics handout.)

This handout will discuss two types of dependent clauses: subordinate clauses and adjective clauses.

SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

Subordinate clauses are clauses that begin with subordinating conjunctions. Subordinating conjunctions are words or phrases that help to bring ideas together by showing cause and effect, time relationships, opposition, and condition.

Here are some examples of subordinating conjunctions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subordinating Conjunction</th>
<th>Subordinating Conjunction</th>
<th>Subordinating Conjunction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because</td>
<td>Whereas</td>
<td>Whenever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although</td>
<td>Though</td>
<td>Every time (that)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While</td>
<td>As</td>
<td>Providing (that)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When</td>
<td>Since</td>
<td>Provided (that)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If</td>
<td>As soon as</td>
<td>After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Now that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So (that)</td>
<td>Until</td>
<td>Unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whether or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>As/So long as</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here is an example of how a subordinating conjunction can fit into a subordinate clause:

Given: when we were in Toronto

This subordinate clause is not a complete sentence. It needs to be combined with an independent clause.

Here are some examples of how a subordinating clause can fit into a sentence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. When we were in Toronto, we went to the beach.</th>
<th>2. We went to the beach when we were in Toronto.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Sentences 1 and 2 are both complete sentences. Each consists of a subordinate clause that is combined with an independent clause.

**Punctuation rule:** If a subordinate clause comes before an independent clause (as in sentence 1), you must put a comma after the subordinate clause. If a subordinate clause comes after an independent clause (as in sentence 2), you must not put a comma between the clauses.
ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

Adjective clauses are dependent clauses that modify (describe or identify) nouns. An adjective clause includes a relative pronoun that stands in for the noun being modified. Depending on the sentence, the relative pronoun may function as the subject of the clause, the object of the verb, or the object of a preposition.

Here are some examples of relative pronouns:

Who    That    Which    Whom    Whose

RELATIVE PRONOUNS AS SUBJECTS OF ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

This adjective clause is not a complete sentence. It needs to be combined with an independent clause containing the noun that it modifies. Adjective clauses may follow independent clauses, or they may interrupt them.

Sentence 1 is complete. It consists of an independent clause and an adjective clause that describes the noun beach.

Sentence 2 has the same meaning as sentence 1.

General Guideline:
- *that* is used for people and things
- *which* is used for things
- *who* is used for people
  (in writing, *who* is preferred to *that* when referring to people)

When the noun being modified is a person, either *who* or *that* may be used. Sentences 3 and 4 have the same meaning.

Sentence 5 demonstrates another way to express essentially the same idea. Here, the adjective clause interrupts the independent clause.
RELATIVE PRONOUNS AS OBJECTS OF VERBS IN ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

Object of the verb  Subject
\[ \text{who I met at the bookstore} \]

In this clause, the relative pronoun who is the object of the verb met.

When the relative pronoun is used as the object of the verb, the adjective clause can take several forms.

1. I’d like you to meet the woman who I met at the bookstore.
   If the noun being modified is a person, you may use who or whom.
   Traditionally, whom was required to refer to objects, and who was used for subjects; however, modern English usage accepts both who and whom for objects.
   (If the noun being modified is a thing, you may use which.)

2. I’d like you to meet the woman whom I met at the bookstore.
   You may use that.

3. I’d like you to meet the woman that I met at the bookstore.
   You may omit the relative pronoun.

4. I’d like you to meet the woman I met at the bookstore.

Note: It is important to always place an adjective clause pronoun as close as possible to the noun it modifies. If you place the adjective clause beside a noun it is not meant to modify, you will create a “misplaced modifier” error, which could change the meaning of your sentence and cause confusion for your reader.

Here is an example of how a misplaced modifier error can change meaning:

I’d like you, who I met at the bookstore, to meet the woman.

This sentence suggests that I met you at the bookstore rather than the woman.
RELATIVE PRONOUNS AS OBJECTS OF PREPOSITIONS IN ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

In this clause, the relative pronoun *which* is the object of the preposition *for*.

When the relative pronoun is used as the *object of a preposition*, the adjective clause can take several forms.

The most formal way to express these ideas is to place the preposition at the beginning of the adjective clause as in Sentences 1 and 2 (below). In this type of sentence construction, if the noun being modified is a person, you must use *whom.* If the noun being modified is a thing, you must use *which.*

1. Mr. Cantley is the teacher from whom I first learned about politics.

2. Tomorrow, I’ll write the exam for which I have been studying so hard.

The more common way to express these ideas is to place the preposition after the subject and verb of the adjective clause as in Sentences 3, 4, and 5 (below). In this type of sentence construction, the adjective clause can take several forms.

3. Tomorrow, I’ll write the exam which I have been studying so hard for.

   You may use “which.”
   (If the noun being modified is a person, you may use “who” or “whom.”)

4. Tomorrow, I’ll write the exam that I have been studying so hard for.

   You may use “that.”

5. Tomorrow, I’ll write the exam I have been studying so hard for.

   You may omit the relative pronoun.
USING THE RELATIVE PRONOUN “WHOSE” IN ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

The relative pronoun *whose* is used to demonstrate possession. It may be used to modify people or things.

Both *whose* and the noun to which it is connected (in Sentence 1, *dog*; in Sentence 2, *language*) must always be placed at the beginning of the adjective clause.

1. The man *whose* dog jumped on me apologized profusely.

   Independent Clause
   Adjective Clause

2. I’m nervous about moving to a city *whose* language is neither English nor French.

   Independent Clause
   Adjective Clause

USING PUNCTUATION IN ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

You should not use commas around adjective clauses if the adjective clause is necessary to identify the noun being modified.

No comma
No comma

1. The cake that Sara made is absolutely delicious.

Sentence 1 does not take commas because the adjective clause identifies the noun *cake*. The cake in this sentence is identified as *the cake that Sara made*.

You should use commas around adjective clauses if the adjective clause is not necessary to identify the noun being modified; that is, if it just gives extra information about the noun.

Comma
Comma

2. My birthday cake, which Sara made, is absolutely delicious.

Sentence 2 takes commas because the adjective clause does not identify the noun *cake*. The cake in this sentence is identified as *my birthday cake*; thus, the fact that Sara made it is extra rather than necessary information.

When commas are necessary, the relative pronoun *that* may not be used (see Sentence 2). When commas are not necessary, *that* is preferable to *which* (see Sentence 1).

When commas are necessary, object pronouns may not be omitted.

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EXERCISES
A. Identify the subjects and verbs in the following sentences by writing an “S” above the subject and a “V” above the verb. Identify the types of dependent clauses by underlining independent clauses once, subordinate clauses twice, and adjective clauses with a dotted line. Then indicate which type of sentence each one is.

Examples:

a. Over the summer, Tim plans to work at the camp that he went to when he was little.  

b. After he finishes school, Tim plans work at the camp to which he went as a child.  

c. Tim's camp, which is located in the Laurentians, is one of his favourite places; Tim has fantastic memories that make him smile every time he thinks of them.

1. Sasha needs to get in touch with Stephanie, whose textbook he borrowed last class.

2. The people who are subletting our apartment are moving in on Thursday; however, they’re letting us return on Friday to pick up some of our things.

3. Whenever playoff season rolls around, I clear my schedule so that I’ll be available to watch every game.

4. The audience to whom the story seems to be addressed has a sophisticated vocabulary and is well versed in literary theory.

5. Although I promised to be there on Monday, I have to cancel due to my annual dental check-up, which I’d completely forgotten about.

6. If we hope to make it to the show, we’ll have to leave as soon as we finish dinner.
B. The following sentences include adjective clauses that contain errors. Add commas where necessary, remove unnecessary commas, and change relative pronouns as needed.

1. The book, that I just finished reading, was excellent; I would definitely recommend it to anyone, that loves historical fiction.

2. Henri and Justine have enrolled in The Vampire in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction that is a brand-new class at their college.

3. As soon as I learned that I had failed my microeconomics midterm, I scheduled appointments with both my teacher and the woman whom tutors me in that subject.

4. When I was a child, my mother had me write thank-you cards to anyone from which I received gifts; thus, she taught me the importance of showing gratitude to people whose showed me kindness.

5. Karina grew up on a working dairy farm. She was responsible for milking cows every morning, and on weekends she’d help her dad make a cheese, whose texture and flavor were wonderfully rich.

6. You’ve got to go to this bakery! The pastries, which they sell, are the best in town, and the girl which makes them is one of my closest friends.

7. The main character whose name is Sophia is a young engineer, that is doing her best to integrate into a male-dominated workplace.

C. Apply your understanding of how dependent clauses work by writing sentences according to the instructions below. You may write sentences which do or do not require commas; just be sure to use commas appropriately.

1. Write a sentence that includes an adjective clause in which the relative pronoun is the subject of the clause.

   ________________________________

2. Write a sentence that includes an adjective clause in which the relative pronoun is the object of the verb.

   ________________________________

3. Write a sentence that includes an adjective clause in which the relative pronoun is the object of a preposition, and the preposition is placed at the beginning of the adjective clause.

   ________________________________

4. Write a sentence that includes an adjective clause in which the relative pronoun is the object of a preposition, and the preposition is placed after the subject and the verb of the adjective clause.

   ________________________________
5. Write a sentence that includes an adjective clause that uses the relative pronoun whose.

6. Write a sentence that includes an adjective clause which requires commas.

7. Write a sentence that includes an independent clause which is interrupted by an adjective clause.

8. Write a sentence that includes both subordinate and adjective clauses.

9. Write a sentence that includes a subordinate clause followed by an independent clause.

10. Write a sentence that includes an independent clause followed by a subordinate clause.

11. Write a compound-complex sentence that includes an adjective clause.

12. Write a compound-complex sentence that includes a subordinate clause.

13. Write a compound-complex sentence that includes both an adjective clause and a subordinate clause.