

Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

# 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:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| that whether who whomwhose which | what where when why howhow much | how many how far how long how oftenhow soon after | although as becauseeverywhere ifso |

# 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”)