

San José State University Writing Center

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How Do I Identify Subordinating Conjunctions?

Unlike *coordinating conjunctions*, subordinating conjunctions are far too many to remember using an acronym (see [Coordinating Conjunctions](#)). However, unlike coordinators, subordinators can be “played by ear”: that is, we can test to confirm whether a word is a subordinator by putting it at the beginning of a complete sentence. If adding the word makes the sentence into a fragment, then the word is a subordinator. Consider the following example.

Charlie chugged the cola.

when Charlie chugged the cola

Charlie chugged the cola is an independent clause as it has both a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. It can stand on its own as a complete sentence. Add *when* to the beginning, and the clause becomes dependent: it is still a clause (since it has both a subject and a verb), but it does not express a complete thought. The reader is left with the question, “What happened when Charlie chugged the cola?” To express a complete thought, the dependent clause requires an independent clause.

When Charlie chugged the cola, the sport of competitive cola drinking changed forever.

Try the following exercise to tune your ear to find subordinate clauses. Keep in mind that coordinating conjunctions, or FANBOYS (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*), are not subordinators, and therefore, they do not make clauses subordinate, so clauses linked with coordinating conjunctions remain independent.

The boy prayed as the ground shook.

The example above is composed of two clauses.

The boy prayed (independent clause)

as the ground shook (dependent subordinate clause)

Notice that the dependent subordinate clause *as the ground shook* provides information that elaborates on the independent clause *the boy prayed*; the conjunction *as* serves to establish the relationship between the two clauses, namely that both things happened at the same time.

On the table below, subordinating conjunctions are categorized according to the types of relationships that they can establish between clauses.

Showing Causal Relationships	Granting Concessions	Specifying Conditions	Telling Place	Signaling Temporal Relationships	Setting up Comparison	Setting up Contrasts
as because in order so that now that since	although as as though even though just as though whereas while	even if if in case provided unless	where wherever	after as as soon as as long as before once still till until when whenever while	as as though	though whereas while although

Although this table does not provide an exhaustive list of subordinating conjunctions or the types of relationships that they may create between clauses, it illustrates the variety of relationships that you can establish between clauses by using subordinating conjunctions.

Activity 2: Adding Subordinators for Cohesion

The following paragraph contains only independent clauses and no conjunctions. Use conjunctions to specify the relationships between the ideas in the paragraph. Discuss your answers and other potential answers with your tutor.

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