



Sentence Structure Basics: Subordination

Overview:

Subordination creates unequal emphasis between ideas and emphasizes a major idea in one **independent clause**, while placing minor ideas in subordinate, or **dependent**, clauses. Dependent clauses are marked by **subordinating conjunctions**, or dependent words. Understanding subordination allows you to create complex sentences, adding **sentence variety** to your paragraphs. It also helps you avoid creating **sentence fragments**.

Subordination

As the name suggests, **subordination** creates clauses that are subordinate—or less important—than the main independent clause because subordination emphasizes a major idea in one independent clause, while placing minor ideas in subordinate clauses. Choosing the clause to stress, however, depends upon your intended meaning. The meaning of the sentence will often change based on the idea you subordinate. Notice how the meaning is different in the following examples:

As I continued to revise my paper, my points became clearer.
Although my points became clearer, I continued to revise my paper.

In the first sentence, the clarity of the author’s points is emphasized. The second sentence, however, stresses the author’s continued revision. To focus the sentence on revision, subordinate the clarity of the points and vice versa.

A subordinate clause is separated from the main clause with a **comma** and would, if it stood alone, be a sentence fragment. For example, “Although my points became clearer” cannot stand alone as a sentence.

Subordinating Conjunctions

A subordinate, or **dependent**, clause containing the less important idea usually begins with a subordinating conjunction.

Here are some common subordinating conjunctions:

<i>after</i>	<i>as long as</i>	<i>if</i>	<i>since</i>	<i>though</i>	<i>where</i>	<i>who</i>
<i>although</i>	<i>because</i>	<i>in order to</i>	<i>so</i>	<i>unless</i>	<i>whereas</i>	<i>whom</i>
<i>as</i>	<i>before</i>	<i>provided that</i>	<i>so that</i>	<i>until</i>	<i>which</i>	<i>whose</i>
<i>as if</i>	<i>even though</i>	<i>rather than</i>	<i>that</i>	<i>when</i>	<i>while</i>	

Examples of subordinate clauses joined with independent clauses:

Even though I am scared of flying, I am taking a plane to Spain.

Since I am graduating next month, I need to start looking for a job.

Whereas my sister's favorite subject is math, I prefer English.

Jane's essay had many grammatical errors **because** she did not proofread it.

Notice that though subordinate clauses beginning with “because” are followed by a **comma**, “because” clauses in the middle of a sentence are not preceded by a comma.

For example:

Because I did not study, I failed the test.

I failed the test **because** I did not study.

Style Matters:

Now look at your own writing. Can you identify sentences that contain subordinate, or dependent, clauses? Do those clauses begin with subordinating conjunctions? Focus on one paragraph. Revise that paragraph so that two of your sentences consist of a dependent clause attached to an independent clause using a subordinating conjunction. Remember, however, to avoid structuring *all* of your sentences this way. Try putting the subordinate clause at the beginning of some sentences and the end of others. Sentence structures should vary in order to avoid monotony and maintain the reader's interest.