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Subordinate Clauses

A subordinate clause may function either as a noun, adjective, or adverb in a sentence. Depending on its function, the clause will be labeled as either a

1. Noun clause
2. Adjective clause
3. Adverb clause

A **noun clause** functions as a noun in a sentence, and can be used as a subject, predicate nominative, or object.

Examples:

Whatever you learn will help you in the future. (Noun clause as subject)
My first impression is **that you are honest**. (Noun clause as P.N.)
He knows **that he will pass the test**. (Noun clause as direct object)
She was not responsible for what Joey did. (Noun clause as O.P)

An **adjective clause**, like an adjective, modifies a noun or pronoun.

Examples:

He wore a shirt **which looked nice**. (Which shirt?)
An apple **that has turned brown** is rotten. (What kind of apple?)
I was looking for the person **who was shouting**. (Which person?)
The girl, **who was often loud**, sat quietly. (What kind of girl?)

Adjective clauses come in two types: **restrictive** and **nonrestrictive**.

A restrictive clause limits the meaning of the preceding noun or pronoun, while a nonrestrictive clause does not.

Examples:

The student in the class **who studied a lot** passed the test. (Restrictive clause)
The student in the class, **who had attended all the lectures**, passed the test (Nonrestrictive clause)

In the first sentence the clause "who studied a lot" restricts the meaning of the noun "student." We know which specific student passed the test- the one who studied a lot.

In the second sentence the clause gives us information about the noun but does not limit the noun. The student who passed the test attended all the lectures, but there can be several other students in the class who also attended all the lectures.

(Quick tip- a nonrestrictive clause will always be separated from the main clause by commas, as with the example above.)

An adverb clause functions as an adverb and modifies a verb, adjective clause, or other adverb clause. These clauses give information about **time** (when, since, before, after), **cause and effect** (because, since, as long as), **contrast** (although, even, while, though), or **condition** (if, unless, provided, even if, in case).

Examples:

Don't go **before he comes**. (When? Before he comes.)
He takes medicine **because he is sick**. (Why? Because he is sick.)
Although he tried his best, he still fell short. (Contrast. Although he tried, he failed.)

Who vs Whom

To determine whether to use who or whom in a subordinate clause, you must determine the relative pronoun's function within the clause. Locating the subordinate clause is easy, since it will always begin with the relative pronoun.

Examples:

Do you know **who the choice was**?
The man **whom he trusted** betrayed him.
They didn't catch **whoever had stolen the diamond**.

The more difficult task comes with determining how the pronoun is used within the subordinate clause. The first rules to remember are the cases of the pronouns: **who** is the **nominative case** pronoun and **whom** is the **objective case** pronoun.

Why is this significant? It means that whenever you see **who** as the relative pronoun in a subordinate clause, you know it is being used as either a **subject** or a **predicate nominative** within the clause, since both of those uses require the nominative case.

Examples:

1. The person **who gave us this flyer** had quite an attitude.
Step 1- Separate the subordinate clause from the rest of the sentence. "who gave us this flyer"
Step 2- Since the pronoun is "who," determine if it is the subject or the predicate nominative.
"gave" is the verb of the clause, and "who" is the subject of the verb
"who" is therefore the subject of the clause.
2. Do you know **who the candidate is**?
Step 1- Separate the clause. "who the candidate is"
Step 2- Determine if "who" is the subject or predicate nominative.
"is" is the verb, and "candidate" is the subject of the verb. "The candidate is who"
"who" is therefore the predicate nominative, because it is restating the subject.
(HINT- look for the common form of be!)

If you see **whom** as the relative pronoun within the subordinate clause, you know it is being used as a **direct object**, an **indirect object**, or an **object of a preposition**, since these three uses require the objective case.

Examples:

1. I saw Mark, an actor **whom I had met after the play**.
Step 1: Separate the clause. "whom I had met after the play"
Step 2: Determine if "whom" is a direct object, indirect object, or object of a preposition.
"had met" is the verb of the clause, and "I" is the subject of the verb.
Mentally rearrange the clause: "I had met whom after the play"
"whom" is the **direct object** of the verb "had met"
2. The man **whom Geoff had paid \$200 to fix the car** was not a certified mechanic.
Step 1: Separate the clause. "whom Geoff had paid \$200 to fix the car"
Step 2: Determine if whom is a d.o., i.o., or o.p.
-"had paid" is the verb of the clause, and "Geoff" is the subject of the verb.
-Mentally rearrange: "Geoff had paid whom \$200 to fix the car"
-\$200 is the direct object of the verb (what did Geoff pay? \$200)
-"whom" is the **indirect object** (to whom did Geoff pay the \$200?)

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3. The teacher **to whom I was directed** was very helpful.

Step 1: Separate the clause. "to whom I was directed"

Step 2: Determine if whom is a d.o., i.o., or o.p.

- "was directed" is the verb of the clause, and "I" is the subject of the verb.

- Since "whom" comes after the preposition "to," it is an **object of the preposition**.

4. This foe was the one **whom he had been preparing for**.

Step 1: Separate the clause. "whom he had been preparing for"

Step 2: Determine if whom is a d.o., i.o., or o.p.

- "had been preparing" is the verb of the clause, and "he" is the subject of the verb.

- Mentally rearrange: "he had been preparing for whom"

- Since "whom" comes after the preposition "for," it is the **object of the preposition**.

(HINT- when you see a preposition at the end of a clause, rearrange the clause.)

If you are still confused, here's a tip: once you separate the subordinate clause from the sentence, try replacing who/whom with he/him to help you out.

Examples:

I saw Mark, an actor **whom I had met after the play**.

When we separate the subordinate clause ("whom I had met after the play") and identify the subject ("I") and the verb ("had met"), we can rearrange the clause to standard construction. "I had met whom after the play."

Now try plugging in "him" to replace "whom".

"I had met him after the play."

Sounds right, right? Now you can easily see how "him" is the direct object of the verb "had met."

Do you know **who the candidate is**?

Again, separate the clause: "who the candidate is"

Identify the verb (is) and the subject (candidate)

Now rearrange: "the candidate is who"

Replace "who" with "he"

"The candidate is he" (it may sound weird, but we know from previous rules that this is correct. You could reverse it and say "he is the candidate" without changing the pronoun's function.)

Since "he" is a restatement of "candidate" separated by a common form of "be," we know we have a predicate nominative.