

Subordinating Conjunctions

Introduction

In English grammar, conjunctions act as the glue that binds words, phrases, and clauses together, they ensure our sentences are not just a disjointed collection of thoughts, but a coherent narrative that flows smoothly from one idea to the next.

Conjunctions come in various forms, each serving a unique purpose. Among these, subordinating conjunctions hold a special place. They introduce dependent clauses. They allow us to express relationships between ideas, such as cause and effect, contrast, and time.

In this lesson, we will delve into the world of subordinating conjunctions. We will start by understanding what they are and how they function. We will then explore the different types of subordinating conjunctions and their usage in English sentences.

What are subordinating conjunctions?

Subordinating conjunctions are a type of conjunction that introduce a **dependent clause**, also known as a **subordinate clause**. This clause cannot stand alone as a complete sentence because it does not express a complete thought.

Subordinating conjunctions are used to create complex sentences containing an independent clause, or main clause, and a dependent clause. The subordinating conjunction provides a transition between the two ideas in the sentence, indicating a time, place, or cause-and-effect relationship.

In other words, a subordinating conjunction connects a dependent clause to an independent clause, creating a sentence that is more detailed and nuanced. The clause introduced by the subordinating conjunction is always the one that is less important and is dependent on the main clause for its full meaning.

For example, in the sentence “I read a book **because** I was bored”, “**because**” is the subordinating conjunction that connects the dependent clause “**I was bored**” with the independent clause “**I read a book**”. The sentence wouldn’t make sense without the conjunction linking these two ideas together.

Understanding Subordinating Conjunctions

When a sentence has a main clause and at least one subordinate clause, it is called a “**complex sentence**”. The role of a subordinating conjunction is to establish a link between the two clauses in the sentence by creating a relationship of time, place, condition, concession, comparison, or cause/effect.

In other words, subordinating conjunctions are words that join a subordinate (dependent) clause to a main (independent) clause. They introduce the subordinate clause and express a relationship between it and the main clause.

This relationship can indicate time, place, condition, concession, comparison, or cause and effect. Examples of subordinating conjunctions include words like ‘after’, ‘although’, ‘because’, ‘if’, ‘since’, ‘when’, ‘where’, etc.

For example, in the sentence “I will go to the store **if** it is open”, ‘**if**’ is the subordinating conjunction that links the main clause “**I will go to the store**” with the subordinate clause “**it is open**”, establishing a condition.

Types of Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions are a key component of complex sentences, serving to establish a link between the main clause and the subordinate clause. They create a relationship of time, place, condition, concession, comparison, or cause and effect. Let's delve into the different types of subordinating conjunctions and their uses.

➤ Time

Time subordinating conjunctions are used to indicate when something happens by connecting the main clause with a subordinate clause that presents a time element. Examples include 'after', 'before', and 'since'.

- **After:** This conjunction is used to show that one action follows another. For example, "She went to bed **after** she finished her homework."
- **Before:** This conjunction is used to indicate that one action happens prior to another. For example, "He had breakfast **before** he left for work."
- **Since:** This conjunction is used to show that something has been happening from a particular time in the past until now. For example, "I have been living here **since** 2010."

➤ Cause and Effect

Cause and effect subordinating conjunctions are used to show a cause-effect relationship between two clauses. Examples include 'because', 'since', and 'so that'.

- **Because:** This conjunction is used to indicate a reason or cause. For example, "I am happy **because** I passed my exam."

- **Since:** This conjunction is used to give a reason, similar to 'because'. For example, "She must be at home **since** her car is in the driveway."
- **So that:** This conjunction is used to indicate a purpose or an intended result. For example, "He is saving money **so that** he can buy a new car."

➤ **Contrast**

Contrast subordinating conjunctions are used to show a contrast between two ideas in different clauses. Examples include 'although', 'even though', and 'whereas'.

- **Although:** This conjunction is used to introduce a subordinate clause expressing a fact that surprises us or is the opposite of what we expect. For example, "Although he's very rich, he lives in a small house."
- **Even though:** This conjunction works similarly to 'although' but it makes the contrast stronger. For example, "Even though it was raining, they went for a walk."
- **Whereas:** This conjunction is used to show the contrast between two clauses. For example, "He loves the city, whereas she prefers the countryside."

➤ **Condition**

Condition subordinating conjunctions are used to show that one event depends on another event. Examples include 'if', 'unless', and 'provided that'.

- **If:** This conjunction is used to indicate a condition. For example, "If it rains, we will stay at home."

- **Unless:** This conjunction is used to mean 'if not'. For example, "Unless you study, you will not pass the exam."
- **Provided that:** This conjunction is used to express a condition – something that must happen first before the other thing can happen. For example, "You can go to the party provided that you finish your homework first."

List of common subordinating conjunctions:

Conjunction	Relation	Example
As	Cause	As the price was high, nobody was interested in the product.
Because	Cause	He got the job because he was convincing in the interview
In order that	Reason	You must make a rehearsal in order that you learn it once for all.
Since	Cause	They canceled the deal since they couldn't agree on the price
For	Cause	I am using my father's car for mine is broken down
So that	Reason	He worked hard so that he could get the first mark
Although	Concession	She insisted to go to work although she was ill.
As	Concession	She made no reaction as she heard the bad news
Even though	Concession	She left him even though she was still in love with him
Just as	Time	The train left just as we arrived to the station.
Though	Concession	He made a so bad presentation though he had enough time to prepare
Whereas	Contrast	Paula accepted our invitation whereas John made no reply

While	Time	While they were having dinner, somebody knocked the door
Even if	Concession	I will come even if you don t tell me.
If	Condition	He will not come if you don t tell him
Provided that	Condition	He will come provided that you tell him
Unless	Condition	You will not get better unless you see a doctor
Where	place	GPS can track any place where you might be any time.
After	Time	Only Alex stayed in the office after everyone left
As soon as	Time	<i>As soon as</i> we get the answer, we will phone you.
As long as	Condition	He will take the apartment as long as the rent is reasonable.
Before	Time	Consult your family before you make a decision
Once	Time	Once you arrive there, someone will receive you.
Till	Time	The boy grew taller till he exceeded his father
While	Contrast	While it was an exciting game, the end was boring
When	Time	He was taking a bath when we called him
Whenever	Time	Babies cry whenever they feel tired
Wherever	Place	Wherever he goes, she follows him
Until	Time	He did not understand until I explained twice.

The use of commas with subordinating conjunctions.

When a sentence begins with a subordinate clause, you should use a comma to separate it from the main clause. The subordinate clause is usually introduced by a subordinating conjunction. Here are some examples:

- “**Although** she was in trouble, she never asked for help.”
- “**Once** we were ready to go out, the weather turned bad.”
- “**Before** the game finished, many spectators left the stadium.”

In these examples, the phrases “**Although she was in trouble**”, “**Once we were ready to go out**”, and “**Before the game finished**” are subordinate clauses. They are separated from the main clauses “**she never asked for help**”, “**the weather turned bad**”, and “**many spectators left the stadium**” by commas.

When the main clause comes first in a sentence, there is no need to use a comma. Here are some examples:

- “You can’t attend the show **unless** you have a ticket.”
- “He can’t leave town **as long as** investigations are still in process.”
- “The game was delayed **because** it was raining heavily.”

In these examples, the phrases “**You can’t attend the show**”, “**He can’t leave town**”, and “**The game was delayed**” are main clauses. They are followed by the subordinate clauses “**unless you have a ticket**”, “**as long as investigations are still in process**”, and “**because it was raining heavily**”. No commas are used in these sentences.

Subordinating conjunctions Vs relative pronouns

In English, there is another group of words that precede subordinate clauses called “**relative pronouns**”. These pronouns, although they function almost the same way as subordinating conjunctions, are different in that they serve as the subject of the subordinate clause, while subordinating conjunctions do not. They are followed by the subject of the subordinate clause.

Let’s look at some examples:

“Everybody congratulated the students **who** got the best marks.” In this sentence, we have two clauses:

- “Everybody congratulated students” is the main clause.

- “**Who** got the best marks” is the subordinate clause.

The subordinate clause provides more information about “students”, and “who” is the subject of the subordinate clause.

“The meeting began **as soon as** everybody was ready.” In this sentence, each of the clauses has its own subject:

- “The meeting” for the main clause.
- “Everybody” for the subordinate clause.

The subordinating conjunction “as soon as” only creates a time relationship between the two components of the sentence.

Using Multiple Subordinating Conjunctions in a Sentence

Now, let’s consider a sentence with multiple subordinating conjunctions:

“Although I was tired, I decided to work **because** the project was due the next day.”

In this sentence, “**although**” and “**because**” are the subordinating conjunctions. “**Although**” connects the main clause “**I decided to work**” with the subordinate clause “**I was tired**”, expressing a contrast. “**Because**” connects the main clause “**I decided to work**” with another subordinate clause “**the project was due the next day**”, expressing a reason.

Let’s break down some more complex examples:

“Before you go to the party, make sure that you finish your homework, **unless** you want to do it after the party.”

Here, “**before**”, “**that**”, and “**unless**” are the subordinating conjunctions.

“**Before**” connects the main clause “**make sure that you finish your homework**” with the subordinate clause “**you go to the party**”, expressing a time relation. “**That**” introduces the subordinate clause “**you finish your**

homework" which is the content of the main clause "**make sure**". "**Unless**" introduces another subordinate clause "**you want to do it after the party**", expressing a condition.

"**If** it rains tomorrow, and **since** we don't have an indoor venue, the event will be cancelled."

In this sentence, "**if**" and "**since**" are the subordinating conjunctions. "**If**" connects the main clause "**the event will be cancelled**" with the subordinate clause "**it rains tomorrow**", expressing a condition. "**Since**" introduces another subordinate clause "**we don't have an indoor venue**", expressing a reason.

Starting a Sentence with a Subordinating Conjunction

Starting a sentence with a subordinating conjunction can help you vary your sentence structure and make your writing more engaging. Here are some examples:

"**Although** it was raining, we decided to go for a walk."

Here, "**Although**" is the subordinating conjunction that starts the sentence. It introduces the dependent clause "**it was raining**" and expresses a contrast with the main clause "**we decided to go for a walk**."

"**Before** we start the meeting, please make sure all your devices are on silent."

In this sentence, "**Before**" is the subordinating conjunction that starts the sentence. It introduces the dependent clause "**we start the meeting**" and expresses a time relation with the main clause "**please make sure all your devices are on silent**."

Let's break down some more complex examples:

"**Unless** you finish your homework, you cannot play video games."

Here, "**Unless**" is the subordinating conjunction that starts the sentence. It introduces the dependent clause "**you finish your homework**" and expresses a condition for the main clause "**you cannot play video games**".

"**Since** we are running late, we should take a taxi instead of walking."

In this sentence, "**Since**" is the subordinating conjunction that starts the sentence. It introduces the dependent clause "**we are running late**" and expresses a cause for the main clause "**we should take a taxi instead of walking**."

Practice Exercises

Try to complete the sentences using appropriate subordinating conjunctions.

1. _____ you finish your homework, you can play video games.
2. I will go to the park _____ it doesn't rain.
3. _____ I was tired, I decided to go for a run.
4. _____ we were driving, we saw a deer cross the road.
5. I enjoy reading _____ it's quiet.

Answers and Explanations:

1- Unless you finish your homework, you can play video games.

Here, **unless** is used as a subordinating conjunction to express a condition. The sentence means that you can play video games on the condition that you finish your homework.

2- If I will go to the park **if** it doesn't rain.

In this sentence, **if** is used as a subordinating conjunction to express a condition. The sentence means that I will go to the park on the condition that it doesn't rain.

3- **Although** I was tired, I decided to go for a run.

Here, **although** is used as a subordinating conjunction to express a contrast. The sentence means that despite being tired, I decided to go for a run.

4- **While** we were driving, we saw a deer cross the road.

In this sentence, **while** is used as a subordinating conjunction to express a time relation. The sentence means that we saw a deer cross the road at the same time we were driving.

5- I enjoy reading **when** it's quiet.

Here, when is used as a subordinating conjunction to express a time relation. The sentence means that I enjoy reading at times when it's quiet.

Fill in the blanks with the correct subordinating conjunction from the options given in brackets.

1. _____ (Because/If) you don't study, you will not pass the exam.
2. She didn't get the job, _____ (although/unless) she had all the required qualifications.
3. _____ (While/Before) we were watching the movie, the power went out.
4. He won't be able to play in the match _____ (if/because) he is injured.
5. _____ (After/Although) she had finished her work, she decided to take a short break.

Answers and Explanations:

1- **If** you don't study, you will not pass the exam.

Here, **if** is used as a subordinating conjunction to express a condition. The sentence means that you will not pass the exam on the condition that you don't study.

2- She didn't get the job, **although** she had all the required qualifications.

In this sentence, **although** is used as a subordinating conjunction to express a contrast. The sentence means that despite having all the required qualifications, she didn't get the job.

3- **While** we were watching the movie, the power went out.

Here, **while** is used as a subordinating conjunction to express a time relation. The sentence means that the power went out at the same time we were watching the movie.

4- He won't be able to play in the match **if** he is injured.

In this sentence, **if** is used as a subordinating conjunction to express a condition. The sentence means that he won't be able to play in the match on the condition that he is injured.

5- **After** she had finished her work, she decided to take a short break.

Here, **after** is used as a subordinating conjunction to express a time relation. The sentence means that she decided to take a short break after she had finished her work.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a subordinating conjunction?

A subordinating conjunction is a type of conjunction that introduces a dependent clause, connecting it to an independent clause. Examples include words like 'because', 'although', 'when', 'while', etc.

2. How do subordinating conjunctions function in a sentence?

Subordinating conjunctions function to provide a link between two clauses and to emphasize the importance of one clause over the other. The clause beginning with the subordinating conjunction is usually the less important one.

3. Can you give an example of a sentence using a subordinating conjunction?

Sure, here's an example: "I went to bed **because** I was tired." In this sentence, 'because' is the subordinating conjunction.

4. Can a sentence start with a subordinating conjunction?

Yes, a sentence can start with a subordinating conjunction. For example, "Although it was raining, we decided to go out."

5. How many subordinating conjunctions are there in English?

There are dozens of subordinating conjunctions in English. Some of the most common ones include 'after', 'although', 'as', 'because', 'before', 'if', 'since', 'though', 'unless', 'until', 'when', 'while', and 'where'.

6. What is the difference between coordinating and subordinating conjunctions?

Coordinating conjunctions connect words, phrases, or clauses of equal rank or importance, while subordinating conjunctions introduce a dependent clause, showing a relationship between it and an independent clause.

7. Can a subordinating conjunction be used in the middle of a sentence?

Yes, a subordinating conjunction can be used in the middle of a sentence. For example, "I will go to the store if I need milk."

8. Can a sentence have more than one subordinating conjunction?

Yes, a sentence can have more than one subordinating conjunction. For example, "I will go to the store after I finish my homework and before it gets dark."