

Multi-Clause Sentences

# What Is a Complex Sentence?



twinkl

# Getting Started

What is a main clause?

A **main clause** (or it could be called a **simple sentence**) is a group of words that expresses one complete thought. Every **main clause** must contain a **subject** and a **verb**. They can also be called **independent** clauses.

Can you spot the subjects and the verbs in these main/independent clauses?

**subject**

The **horse galloped.**

**verb**

**Mr Richardson ate** some cheese.

# Getting Started

## What is a complex sentence?

A **complex sentence** is made up of a **main clause** and then **one or more dependent clauses**.

There are two ways of creating dependent clauses:

- **by using a subordinating conjunction** (*e.g. after*) to create a subordinate clause, *e.g.*

The horse galloped after it jumped the fence.

- **by adding extra information using a relative clause.**

Mr Richardson, who was feeling ravenous, ate some cheese.

# Next Steps: Subordinating Conjunctions

Firstly, let's look at creating complex sentences by using subordinate clauses that begin with a subordinating conjunction.

I

S

A

W

A

W

A

B

U

B

is an acronym to help you remember the first letters of some of the most important subordinating conjunctions.

If

Since

As

When

Although

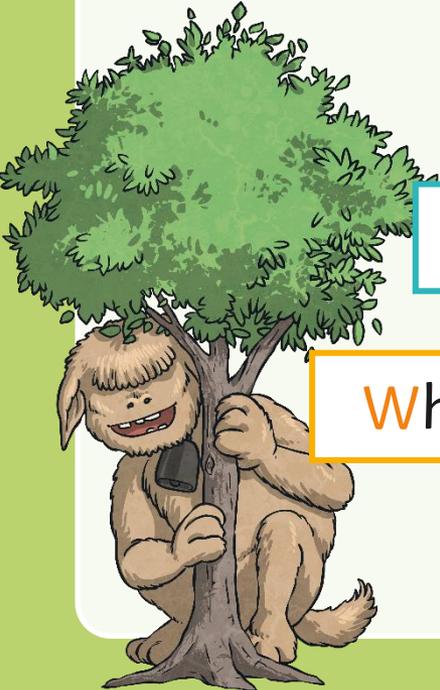
While

After

Before

Until

Because



# Next Steps: Subordinating Conjunctions

So, how do we use subordinating conjunctions?

Subordinating conjunctions are the first words within a subordinate clause. Subordinate clauses do not make sense on their own (they are dependent) but when they are used with a main clause, they create a complex (multi-clause) sentence.

Subordinate clauses will always have a **subject** and **verb** within them, e.g.

before they left

subordinating  
conjunction

subject

verb

is a subordinate clause

before the holidays

here 'before' is being used as  
a preposition

is not a subordinate clause



I SAW A WABUB!

## Next Steps: Subordinating Conjunctions

Can you spot the **subordinate clause** and the **subordinating conjunction** in this complex sentence?

Juvenile penguins are able to swim, **although** their feathers aren't yet waterproof.

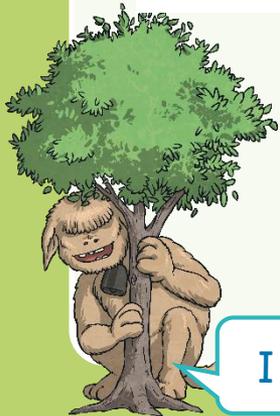


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## Next Steps: Subordinating Conjunctions

Can you spot the **subordinate clause** and the **subordinating conjunction** in this complex sentence?

The boy scouts sang around the campfire **until** it was time for bed.



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## Next Steps: Subordinating Conjunctions

Can you spot the **subordinate clause** and the **subordinating conjunction** in this complex sentence?

Hakim could win the talent contest **if** he improved his juggling skills.



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## Next Steps: Subordinating Conjunctions

In the complex sentences we have looked at so far, the subordinate clause has always come after the main clause but watch...

**Although** their feathers aren't yet waterproof, juvenile penguins are able to swim.

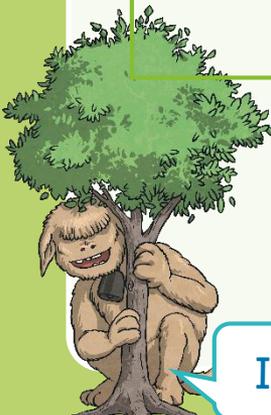


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## Next Steps: Subordinating Conjunctions

**Although** their feathers aren't yet waterproof, juvenile penguins are able to swim.

Subordinating conjunctions can also be used as the first word in a complex sentence. When the subordinate clause comes before the main clause, make sure you remember to use a comma to mark where the subordinate clause ends.



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## Next Steps: Subordinating Conjunctions

Can you swap these sentences around so that the subordinate clause comes before the main clause? Don't forget your commas!

**Until** it was time for bed, the boy scouts sang around the campfire.

**If** he improved his juggling skills, Hakim could win the talent contest.



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# Next Steps: Relative Clauses

Now, let's look at creating complex sentences by using relative clauses. Relative clauses are a different type of dependent clause that give more detail about the subject of the main clause.

Relative clauses begin with a relative pronoun or a relative adverb. Here are some of the most common examples:

who

which

whose

whom

that

where

## Next Steps: Relative Clauses

who

which

whose

whom

that

where

Can you spot the relative clause in this complex sentence?  
What is the relative clause describing?

Mysterious Malcolm, **who is a children's entertainer**, wows his audiences with his magic tricks.

The relative clause describes the 'Mysterious Malcolm' in more detail. When a relative clause is embedded in the middle of a sentence, we surround it with commas.

# Next Steps: Relative Clauses

who

which

whose

whom

that

where

Can you spot the relative clause in this complex sentence?  
What is the relative clause describing?

The astronaut bounded towards the space buggy, **which had been parked in a crater.**

The relative clause describes the 'space buggy' in more detail. When a relative clause is dependent on the main clause, we add a comma to demarcate it from the rest of the sentence.

# Complex Sentence Hunt

Can you spot the complex sentences in this text?  
How have they been created?

The sun was beginning to disappear behind the nearby mountain. Philip's heart sank as he knew he was lost. The group of climbers, who Philip had started out with, were nowhere to be seen. Philip shouted for help but it was hopeless. While there was still a little light, Philip tried to make himself a bed using leaves and twigs. The temperature, which was now close to zero degrees, could be extremely hazardous. If he couldn't find a way to keep warm, he would be in serious danger. It was going to be a long night.

# Complex Sentence Hunt

Why aren't these sentences complex?

The sun was beginning to disappear behind the nearby mountain...

This is just a main clause (or you might call it a simple sentence). It is extended by using a prepositional phrase 'behind the nearby mountain', but this doesn't make it a complex sentence.

Philip shouted for help but it was hopeless.

This is a different type of multi-clause sentence: a compound sentence. It has two main clauses that are joined by a co-ordinating conjunction.

It was going to be a long night.

This again is just a main clause (simple sentence). It is still a good idea to include some of these in your writing for effect.

# Practise Your Skills

Now, it's your turn. Could you add a **subordinate clause** (using an I SAW A WABUB! subordinating conjunction) to this main clause to create a complex sentence:

my little sister is so irritating

Did you place your subordinate clause before or after the main clause?  
Did you include the correct punctuation?



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# Practise Your Skills

Now, it's your turn. Could you add a **subordinate clause** (using an I SAW A WABUB! subordinating conjunction) to this main clause to create a complex sentence:

the dolphin jumped up from  
the water

Did you place your subordinate clause before or after the main clause?  
Did you include the correct punctuation?



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## Practise Your Skills

Now, it's your turn. Could you add a **relative clause** (using a relative pronoun or relative adverb) to this main clause to create a complex sentence:

Tim Peake is a famous  
British astronaut

Did you place you embed your relative clause within the main clause or did you add the relative clause after it?  
Did you include the correct punctuation?

who

which

whose

whom

that

where

## Practise Your Skills

Now, it's your turn. Could you add a **relative clause** (using a relative pronoun or relative adverb) to this main clause to create a complex sentence:

The house on the hill  
remained unsold

Did you place you embed your relative clause within the main clause or did you add the relative clause after it?  
Did you include the correct punctuation?

who

which

whose

whom

that

where

## Let's Write

On the next few slides, we are going to spin the spinner so that we have a particular subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun to use within a complex sentence about a specific picture.



For example, if the spinner landed on 'as'...

As the children trekked through the misty woods, they saw a light shining from a mysterious building.

# Let's Write

Can you use a particular subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun to create a complex sentence based on this picture? Spin the spinner to see which word you must use within your complex sentence.



[Click here to spin](#)

# Let's Write

Can you use a particular subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun to create a complex sentence based on this picture? Spin the spinner to see which word you must use within your complex sentence.



[Click here to spin](#)

# Let's Write

Can you use a particular subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun to create a complex sentence based on this picture? Spin the spinner to see which word you must use within your complex sentence.



[Click here to spin](#)

# Let's Write

Can you use a particular subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun to create a complex sentence based on this picture? Spin the spinner to see which word you must use within your complex sentence.



[Click here to spin](#)

# Quick Quiz: Question 1

Which of these examples are complex sentences?  
Can you explain why?

Giraffes have very long necks, which they use to their advantage to reach tall trees.

The alien approached the spaceship so the crew gasped.

Before lunch, Cassie cycled into town.

Before his Grandma arrived, Billy frantically tidied his bedroom.

## Quick Quiz: Question 2

Complete the sentences below by adding your own subordinate clause using your choice of subordinating conjunctions. Your dependent clause can become before or after the main clause.

he had broken the world record

science is an interesting subject

## Quick Quiz: Question 3

Can you tell me a relative pronoun or relative adverb that can be used to create a complex sentence with a relative clause?

who

which

whose

whom

that

where

Can you use the word you chose within a complex sentence?