

# Noun Clause

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## 1. What is a Noun Clause?

A noun **clause** is a dependent (or **subordinate clause**) that works as a noun. It can be the **subject** of a sentence, an **object**, or a complement. Like all nouns, the purpose of a noun clause is to name a person, place, thing, or idea. Sometimes when we want to name something, a single word won't do – sometimes we need a group of words to name something. That is why we use noun clauses.

## 2. Examples of Noun Clauses

### **Example 1**

If you've watched the Hunger Games: Catching Fire, you have probably heard the song Who We Are, by Imagine Dragons. The chorus contains a noun clause. Can you find it?

*It's who we are*

*Doesn't matter if we've gone too far*

*Doesn't matter if it's all okay*

*Doesn't matter if it's not our day*

If you said, "who we are" then you are off to a good start! Like all clauses, it has a subject (we) and a verb (are). It is also doing what a noun can do – identify something. In this case, the clause is identifying what "it" is. When a noun or noun clause identifies another noun more precisely, we call this a complement (see section 4.)

### **Example 2**

Here is a sentence with two more noun clauses:

*I do not know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future.* – Oprah Winfrey

The two noun clauses are: "what the future holds" and "who holds the future". In both cases, the clauses are doing what nouns can do – acting as direct objects. (see section 4.)

### **Example 3**

Here's another example from the movie, Return of the Jedi. The great teacher, Yoda tells Luke:

*You must unlearn what you have learned.*

So, what must Luke unlearn? "...what you have learned." This clause is a noun clause. It is a direct object in this sentence.

### 3. Parts of a Noun Clause

Remember, because a noun clause is a clause, you should be able to find both a **subject** and a **verb**. Let's do a quick review of these two important terms. (The noun clauses are underlined.)

#### a. Subject

A **subject** is what the clause or sentence is about. The subject is often (but not always) the thing performing the action of the verb.

##### **Example 1**

What **Peter loves most** about reading mysteries is how the **authors leave clues** for careful readers.

In this example, the first clause is about Peter, and the second clause is about authors.

##### **Example 2**

Whoever spilled the milk should clean it up.

In this example, the sentence is about 'whoever'.

#### b. Verb

A **verb** is an action word, or a state-of-being word.

##### **Example 1**

Morning time is when I **feel most energetic**.

In this example, 'feel' is the action word in the sentence.

##### **Example 2**

You **may take** whichever cookie you **want**.

In this example, 'may take' and 'want' are action words.

### 4. Types of Noun Clauses

Let's take a look at how noun clauses are used.

#### a. Noun Clauses as Subjects

##### **Example 1**

Whoever leaves last should turn off the lights.

In this example, the sentence is about 'whoever leaves last'. 'Whoever leaves last' is also the person performing the action of turning off the lights. Therefore, the noun clause is the subject of the sentence.

##### **Example 2**

**That people need water to survive should be obvious to everyone.**

Here, the sentence is about the fact 'that people need water to survive', and so the noun clause works as the subject.

### **Example 3**

*In music, **which note is played** and **how long it is played** are both essential.*

In this example, the sentence is about two things: 'which note is played' and 'how long it is played'. Therefore, both of these noun clauses are the subject of the sentence.

## **b. Noun Clauses as Objects**

Objects are words that 'receive' another part of a sentence. There are three types of objects.

- Direct objects – receive the action of the verb.
- Indirect objects – receive direct objects.
- Objects of prepositions – receive prepositions.

### **Example 1**

*My dog will eat **whatever food I give him.***

Here, the noun clause receives the action of the verb 'eat' so it is a direct object. It answers the question, "eat what?"

### **Example 2**

*The judges will award **whichever painting they like the most** the blue ribbon.*

Here, the noun clause is receiving the direct object 'blue ribbon'. ('Blue ribbon' is the direct object because it is receiving the verb 'award'.)

### **Example 3**

*I want to play with **whoever is a good sport.***

In this case, the noun clause is receiving the preposition 'with'.

## **c. Noun Clauses as Compliments**

A compliment re-states or gives more information about a noun. It always follows a state-of-being verb (is, are, am, will be, was, were).

### **Example 1**

*The winner will be **whoever gets the most votes.***

The noun clause here is a complement because it gives more information about 'winner'.

### **Example 2**

*My hope is **that everyone here becomes friends.***

Here, the noun clause is a complement because it tells more about 'hope'.

## 5. How to write Noun Clauses

Noun clauses always begin with certain words.

The most common of these words are words that we also use to form questions:

- Who
- What
- Why
- Where
- When

We can also begin noun clauses with pronouns:

- Which
- That
- Whoever
- Whatever
- Wherever
- Whenever

However, it is essential to understand that just because you see one of these words does not mean that the word is automatically beginning a noun clause. When identifying the type of a given clause, be careful that you look at its function, not just the words. A clause beginning with the same words as a noun clause may have a different function.

### **Example 1**

- Where I come from is not important.
- The town where I come from is famous for its pizza.

In example (a) we have a noun clause. The function of the clause is to name the subject of the sentence. On the other hand, in example (b) we have an **adjective clause**. The function here is to describe 'the town'.

### **Example 2**

This pair of examples shows how the function of a clause determines what type of clause it is:

- I know who the man is interviewing. Where the man works is down the street.
- My cousin, who the man is interviewing, is applying for a job where the man works.

In this pair of examples, we have two clauses to look at. In example (a) we have a noun clause functioning as a direct object, and a noun clause that is a subject. In example (b), the

first clause is an adjective clause modifying 'cousin', and the second clause is an **adverb clause** modifying 'applying'.

So, it is important when writing noun clauses that you not only pay attention to the words in the clause, but also how the clause functions!

- A few more points about writing noun clauses:
- Remember, noun clauses are dependent (subordinate) clauses. Therefore, they cannot be a sentence on their own.
- Noun clauses will always need to be in a sentence with an **independent clause**. A sentence without an independent clause is an incomplete sentence – a sentence fragment!

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