

Lesson 4 – Noun Clauses

Lesson 4. Noun Clauses

Learning Objectives

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Define what a noun clause.
- Identify the composition of a noun clause.
- Determine the functions and ways to use noun clauses.
- Use pronouns, subordinating conjunctions, or other words properly in forming a noun clause.
- Formulate sentences using noun clauses.

Lesson 4. Noun Clauses

Noun clauses act the same as nouns. Anytime that you use a noun in a sentence, then it is possible to also use a noun clause. For example, (noun clauses **highlighted**):

➔ I like **what I see**.

(Like all clauses, a noun clause has a subject and a verb. In this example, the subject of the clause is "I" and the verb is "see.")

➔ I know **that patience has its limits**.

(In this example, the subject of the clause is "patience" and the verb is "has.")

Compare the two examples above to these:

➔ I like **innovation**.

➔ I know **people**.

How To Check If Your Clause Is Functioning As a Noun

A great way to check whether a phrase or clause is functioning as a noun is to have a go at replacing it with a **pronoun**. If you can, your phrase or clause is functioning as a noun.

➔ What I say is true.

*(Pronoun test: "**It** is true." This proves that "What I say" is functioning as a noun.)*

➔ Show me how they work.

*(Pronoun test: "Show me **them**." This proves that "how they work" is functioning as a noun.)*

Lesson 4. Noun Clauses

Definition: a clause (with a subject and verb) that functions as a noun



Sometimes the introductory word is understood.

- ➔ Daria told me **she was going to be late.**
- ➔ Daria told me **(that) she was going to be late.**

Some noun clauses, especially those used as subjects, begin with **that**, which seems to serve no function. It makes sense if you include **the fact** or **the idea** before it. Some modern English constructions that seem to make no sense are the result of our dropping words.

- ➔ **That** we were late to class really upset the teacher.
- ➔ **The fact that** we were late to class really upset the teacher.

Lesson 4. Noun Clauses

Find out the noun clauses in the following sentences.

1. The king ordered that the traitor should be put to death.
2. He said that he would not go.
3. That he is not interested in the offer is known to us.
4. He said that he was not feeling well.
5. I cannot rely on what he says.
6. I don't know where he has gone.
7. He asked whether the servant had polished his shoes.
8. The news that he is alive has been confirmed.
9. The belief that the soul is immortal is almost universal.
10. It is certain that we will have to admit defeat.
11. It was fortunate that he was present.
12. The report that only ten persons were killed in the riots is not true.

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Noun clauses often begin with pronouns, subordinating conjunctions, or other words. The introductory word generally has a grammatical function in the sentence.

Relative pronouns: that, which, who, whom, whose, what

Indefinite relative pronouns: whoever, whomever, whatever, whichever, whether, if

Interrogative pronoun: who

Interrogative adjective: what

Interrogative adverb: how

Subordinating conjunctions: how, if, when, whenever, where, whether, why

Hint: Whoever/Whomever - the correct choice in formal writing is whichever pronoun is correct in the subordinate sentence. In informal speech, using the correct pronoun often sounds pretentious.

Whoever is responsible for this mess needs to clean it up. (*Whoever* is the subject of the verb *is*.)

Whomever you hit accidentally deserves an apology. (*Whomever* is the direct object of the verb *hit*.)

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Fill in the blanks with the suitable conjunctions given (more than one alternative might be possible in some cases)

that *why* *if* *which* *whether* *when* *who*
where *whose* *what* *how*

1. The poor boy couldn't ever learn _____ killed him.
2. I've been trying to understand _____ it is Nick who insisted that the teachers should come up with a new proposal to the next meeting in order to improve their teaching ability.
3. You'll be surprised to learn _____ hair I've found on the collar of your husband.
4. _____ I really want to find out is _____ you've made this mistake on purpose.
5. You should have guessed _____ she would surely let you down even at the most unexpected occasions.
6. It's clearly understood _____ he took the trouble to help you in the garden.
7. _____ he's telling the truth or not will never be known.
8. It is not difficult to understand _____ different people speak different languages.
9. People, at times, can be so blind that they don't even see _____ is in front of their eyes.

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Noun clauses can act as *subjects*, *direct objects*, *indirect objects*, *subject complement*, *objects of a preposition* or *appositive*. Anytime that you use a noun in a sentence, then it is possible to also use a noun clause.

Subject: *What I had forgotten* was that I had a test today.

Direct object: You must choose *which flavor of ice cream you want*.

Indirect object: I will tell *whoever will listen* my frightening story.

Object of a preposition: Josie is not interested in *whatever Kyle says*.

Subject complement: Michael's excuse was *that he had forgotten to set his alarm*.

Appositive: It seems to bother the teacher *that all the students are being too quiet*.

(That the students are being too quiet seems to bother the teacher. Note that the appositive renames *It*, but does not follow immediately like other appositives.)

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More Examples of Noun Clauses

In a sentence, a noun clause will be a dependent clause. In other words, a noun clause does not stand alone as a complete thought.

- ➔ Ask your child what he wants for dinner only if he's buying. (Fran Lebowitz)
(This noun clause is the [direct object](#) of "ask.")
- ➔ He knows all about art, but he doesn't know what he likes. (James Thurber)
(This noun clause is the direct object of "know.")
- ➔ It is even harder for the average ape to believe that he has descended from man. (H L Mencken)
(This noun clause is the direct object of "believe.")
- ➔ I never know how much of what I say is true. (Bette Midler)
(This noun clause is an [object of a preposition](#).)
- ➔ Man is what he eats. (Ludwig Feuerbach)
(This noun clause is a [subject complement](#).)
- ➔ My one regret in life is that I am not someone else. (Woody Allen)
(This noun clause is a subject complement.)

Lesson 4. Noun Clauses

Parse the sentences below. Point out the noun clause. Diagram the sentence and, to the side of your diagram, indicate what job each clause is doing.

1. What the mob wanted was a revolution.
2. Their message was that any amount of bloodshed was justified.
3. A member of the crowd pointed to where Dr. Manette was.
4. The jury gave whoever had the doctor's support an acquittal.
5. Dr. Manette always had the admiration of whomever he knew.
6. The outcome of Darnay's trial was what really mattered.
7. His lovely wife was astonished by what happened next.
8. That he was being arrested again was quite surprising.
9. What he did came as a complete surprise to everyone.
10. The police have offered whoever finds the stolen diamonds a reward.

Lesson 4. Noun Clauses

1. We use noun clauses with "that" when we are talking about a statement, fact, opinion, or idea.

Fact: Her name is Jane.

➡ I know **that her name is Jane.**

➡ I heard **that her name is Jane.**

Here is a list of verbs that are often followed by a noun clause

agree	understand	forget	remember	hear	feel	doubt	recall
think	hope	know	tell	see	suppose	guess	say

2. We use noun clauses with "if" or "whether" when we are talking about a yes/no question.

Question: Will it rain?

➡ I don't know **if it will rain.**

➡ I have no idea **whether it will rain or not.**

3. We use noun clauses with question words for information questions (not yes/no questions).

Pay attention to the word order. We do not use question word order. We use sentence word order.

Question: Where is the bank located?

Question: Where should he go?

Answer: I don't know **where the bank is located.**

Answer: He doesn't know **where he should go.**

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4. We can also use noun clauses that start with question words as the object. These are not related to questions. Look at some examples.

➔ I eat **what looks good**.

➔ I read **what I want**.

➔ I know **how to make kimchi**.

➔ She knows **where to go**.

5. Noun clauses are used with indirect speech. So, we use noun clauses with words like say, tell, ask, whisper, yell, etc. She asked **whether we will come**.

➔ He asked **if I went to the conference last year**.

➔ She said **that the meaning of life is happiness**.

➔ He yelled **that he was innocent**.

There are so many ways to use nouns. Therefore, there are also many ways to use noun clauses.

Noun clauses are extremely important and you must know them. If you know how to use noun clauses then your English will sound fluent and natural. This an advanced grammar point that has many different uses, so do not worry if it is hard at first.

Lesson 4. Noun Clauses

Practice your speaking with these sentences. Then try making your own sentences.

1. The test results confirmed _____.
2. Everybody was surprised by _____.
3. The funny thing was _____.
4. We were all very worried about _____.
5. _____ struck all of us as odd.
6. We need to talk about _____.
7. I can't imagine what I would do without _____.
8. I don't know how _____.
9. After seeing the news, I suppose _____.
10. You don't have to say it again. I know _____.
11. He said _____ and I believe him.

Lesson 4. Noun Clauses

(Issue 1) Using a noun clause starting with "That" as a subject grates on the ear.

From a grammatical perspective, it is perfectly acceptable to use a noun clause starting with "That" as the subject of a sentence. However, for many, it sounds too unnatural.

- ➔ That he believes his own story is remarkable. (Jerome Blattner)
(Starting a sentence with a noun clause starting "That" is acceptable, but it grates on lots of people's ears. Many writers prefer ""The fact that...".)

If it grates on your ears, opt for "The fact that" instead of just "That." Bear in mind, however, that "The fact that" is considered by some to be a tautology (a needless repetition), meaning it has its own issue.

(Issue 2) Choose the right version of "who" and "whom" at the start of a noun clause.

"Who" is the [subject](#) of a verb. "Whom" isn't. It's the same deal with "whoever" and "whomever."

- ➔ My relationships are between me and whomever I'm with.
(Here, "whomever" is the [object of the preposition](#) "with.")
- ➔ My relationships are between me and whoever is interested.
(Here, "whoever" is the subject of the verb "is." Note that the clause "whoever is interested" is the object of the preposition "between," but that doesn't mean that "whoever" becomes "whomever." If your "whoever" is the subject of a verb, then "whoever," not "whomever," is correct.)

The End