

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.*

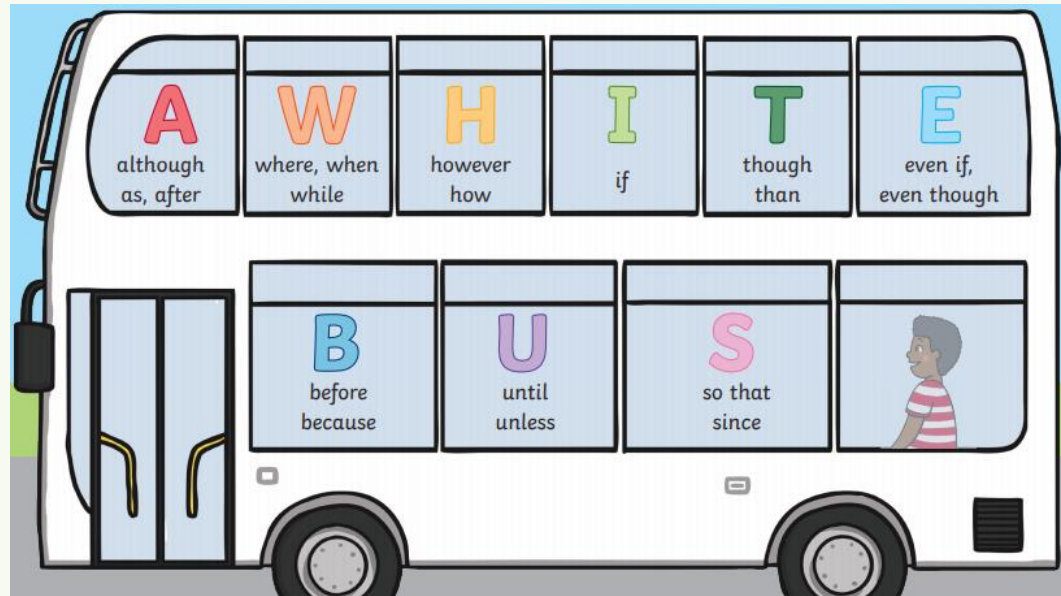
The horse galloped after it jumped the fence.

- 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.



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

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

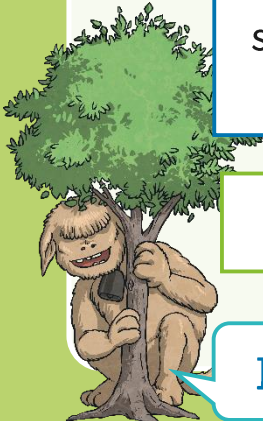
is a subordinate clause

I SAW A WABUB!

before the holidays

here 'before' is being used as
a preposition

is not a subordinate clause



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.



I SAW A WABUB!

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.



I SAW A WABUB!

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.



I SAW A WABUB!

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.



I SAW A WABUB!

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.



I SAW A WABUB!

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.



I SAW A WABUB!

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

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.