The Structure of English Language - Clause Functions
Coordinate clauses | subordinate clauses | adverbial clauses | adjectival clauses

Coordinate clauses
The simplest sentences may contain a single clause. (Simple is a standard description of one kind of sentence.) Where a sentence contains more than one clause, these may be considered of equal grammatical importance. If this is so, these are coordinate clauses. They are joined by a coordinating conjunction, such as and, or or but. (Some grammarians call the first clause of the sentence the main clause, and the others coordinate clauses). Here are some examples:

- You can travel by tube, you can drive or you can take the train.
- Lucy opened her window and in came Count Dracula.

Subordinate clauses
Sometimes the clauses are placed in a hierarchy: the more important ones are main clauses, while the less important are subordinate clauses. A main or coordinate clause could stand on its own as a sentence, but a subordinate clause works only within a sentence. A subordinate clause can do the job of other clause elements. It can work as subject, object, complement and adverbial, as in these examples:

- Subordinate subject clause: What you say is stupid.
- Subordinate object clause: I did not know that you were here.
- Subordinate complement clause: Your first job is learning this grammar.
- Subordinate adverbial clause: Come round when you're ready.

Clauses that function as subject, object or complement replace noun phrases, so they are called nominal clauses. Those that function as adverbs/adjectives are adverbial/adjectival clauses.

Some other kinds of nominal clauses are shown below. For clarity, they are all shown in object position. This is not the only place where they may occur, but is the most common.

- That clause: I think (that) you know each other. (That may be omitted if understood.)
- Wh- clause: I know what you did last summer. (Clause introduced by who, when, what, why, whether.)
- -ing clause: I don't recall seeing her there. (Clause introduced by present participle.)
- inf. clause: I wish to confess to my crimes. (Clause introduced by to + infinitive.)

Adverbial clauses
These are introduced by a subordinating conjunction, which explains the adverbial meaning of the clause. These include when/before/after/while (time); because/since (reason); if/unless/lest (condition), etc., as in these examples:

- When the bell sounds, you may leave the room.
- We cannot send you the goods because we are out of stock.
- Unless you are good, Father Christmas will bring you nothing.

Two minor types of adverbial clause are inf. and -ing clauses.

- Inf. clause: I went to the shop to buy some presents. (Clause introduced by to + infinitive.)
- -ing clause: Jane broke her arm while fighting. (Clause introduced by present participle.)
Adjectival clauses

A familiar type is the relative clause, introduced by a relative pronoun (who, whom, whose, that, which), as in these examples:

- Here is the woman (whom) I married.
- This is the book (which) I am reading.
- The drink (that) I most like is orange-juice.

Two minor types of adjectival clause are -ing and -ed clauses.

- -ing clause: The train now standing at platform four is the 5.30 to Leeds.
- -ed clause: She is the celebrity pursued by the press.

Since past participles do not all end in -ed we may find other verb forms in such clauses: The tea drunk by the students or the exam taken by the pupils.

From Coordination to Subordination

Consider how we might combine these two sentences:
The national speed limit was repealed.
Road accidents have increased sharply.

One option is to coordinate the two sentences:
The national speed limit was repealed and road accidents have increased sharply.

Coordination with and allows us to connect the two main clauses, but it doesn’t clearly identify the relationship between the ideas in those clauses. To clarify that relationship, we may choose to change the first main clause into an adverb clause:

Since the national speed limit was repealed, road accidents have increased sharply.

In this version the time relationship is emphasized. By changing the first word in the adverb clause (a word called a subordinating conjunction), we can establish a different relationship--one of cause:

Because the national speed limit was repealed, road accidents have increased sharply.

Notice that an adverb clause, like an adjective clause, contains its own subject and predicate, but it must be subordinated to a main clause to make sense.

Adverbial clauses

An adverb clause begins with a subordinating conjunction--an adverb that connects the subordinate clause to the main clause. The subordinating conjunction may indicate a relationship of cause, concession, comparison, condition, place, manner, purpose, result or time.

It is important to remember that some conjunctions have several meanings, and the type of clause they introduce can be determined only by an examination of the function of the clause. The uses of the conjunction as illustrate this point:

1. He did his work as his employer had instructed. (Adverbial clause of manner).
2. He can’t speak English as well as he writes it. (Adverbial clause of comparison).
3. He decided to spend his holiday in Austria, as he had never been there before. (Adverbial clause of reason).
4. As he was posting the letter, he suddenly realized that he hadn’t put a stamp on the envelope. (Adverbial clause of time).
5. You’ve made the same mistake as you made before. (Adjectival clause).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>kind of clause</th>
<th>usual conjunction</th>
<th>function</th>
<th>example</th>
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| **time clauses**       | when, whenever, before, after, since, while, as, until, once, as soon as | These clauses are used to say when something happens by referring to a period of time or to another event. | Her father died *when she was young*.  
{ before \{ after \} +subject+verb  
*Before buying this painting*, make sure it is genuine.  
She went out *before I had realized what was happening*. |
| **conditional clauses**| if, unless, whether, provided/-ing (that)…, as/so long as, in case | These clauses are used to talk about a possible situation and its consequences.                                                                 | *If they lose weight during an illness*, they soon regain it afterwards.                                                                                   |
| **purpose clauses**    | = subject: in order to, so as to (in order not to, so as not to) | These clauses are used to indicate the purpose of an action.                                                   | The Post Office introduced automatic sorting to *speed up the delivery of letters*.  
They had to take some of his land *so that they could extend the churchyard*.  
The doctor explained the nature of my illness in medical terms *so that I wouldn’t understand fully*. |
| **reason clauses**     | because, since, as, (because of + (adj)noun, due to/owing to+ (adj)noun) | These clauses are used to indicate the reason for something.                                                 | I couldn’t feel anger against him *because I liked him too much*.                                                                                      |
| **comparison clauses** | as, than, the + comparative | These clauses are used to compare two or more people, things or facts.                                        | He can’t speak English as well as he writes it.  
He plays the piano better than his father.                                                                                                             |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>result clauses</strong> (consecutivas)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>— …, so (that)… (Result clauses associated with degree:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— ...so + adj/adv + that (tan…que…)</td>
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<tr>
<td>— so much + noun(U) + that (tanto/a…que…)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— so many + noun(C) + that(tantos/as…que…)</td>
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<tr>
<td>— such (a/an/-) + adj+ noun + that</td>
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<tr>
<td>These clauses are used to indicate the result of something.</td>
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<td>My suitcase had become damaged on the journey home, <em>so that the lid would not stay closed</em>. The doctor explained the nature of my illness in medical terms, <em>so that I didn’t understand fully</em>. There were <em>so many people in the lecture that we had to stand</em>. It was <em>such an interesting film that we watched it twice</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>concessive clauses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>although, though, even though, even if, while, whereas(mientras que…), despite + noun + -ing in spite of <em>the fact that</em>+subj+vb, (however + adj/adv + clause) 2(*)</td>
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<td>These clauses are used to make two statements, one of which contrasts with the other or makes it seem surprising.</td>
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<td>I used to read a lot <em>although I don’t get much time for books now</em>. Although he is over eighty, he’s still very active. <em>In spite of / Despite his age, he climbed the mountain</em>. <em>In spite of the fact that he is very old</em>, he climbed the mountain. (However rich people are, they always want more).</td>
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<td><strong>place clauses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>where, wherever</td>
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<td>These clauses are used to talk about the location or position of something.</td>
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<td>He said he was happy <em>where he was</em>. <em>Wherever you go, I’ll go with you</em>.</td>
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<td><strong>clauses of manner</strong></td>
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<td>as, as if, the way, <em>like</em></td>
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<td>These clauses are used to talk about someone's behaviour or the way something is done.</td>
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<td>I was never allowed to do things <em>the way I wanted to do them</em>. He solved the problem <em>as one might have expected</em>.</td>
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1(*) Many of the sentences in these exercises could be completed equally well with an adverbial phrase or, in some cases, a single adverb. Students should remember that the group of words they add must contain a verb in order to constitute a clause. Here is a sentence completed in four possible ways:

*Apparently, he tried to follow me … (Time)*

a) Apparently, he tried to telephone me *yesterday.* (Adverb of time).

b) Apparently, he tried to telephone me *the evening before the last.* (Adverbial phrase of time).

c) Apparently, he tried to telephone me *as soon as he received my letter.* (Adverbial clause of time – explicit subject).

d) Apparently, he tried to telephone me *after receiving my letter.* (Adverbial clause of time – implied subject)

2(*) Some adverbials (*Therefore/Nevertheless/However/Even so/Still/Yet*) *enable us* to establish a link between ideas: *He didn’t earn a great deal. Therefore, his wife decided to get a job.* // *The team didn’t really expect to win. Nevertheless, they were disappointed at their defeat.* // *The sea was very rough However/Still/Even so, we made the crossing.* Although these words link ideas, careful writers don’t use them to join sentences—they are not conjunctions.