

ENGLISH 287, FALL 2007 HANDOUTS

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RELATIVE CLAUSES OUTSIDE OF NOUN PHRASES

Unfortunately, not all relative clauses stay neatly lodged in the postmodifying slot after the noun they modify. Sometimes they escape to the end of the sentence, where they may even follow some noun they obviously don't modify. Others lurk at the end of sentences, sometimes even following noun phrases, but do not modify any particular noun phrase at all, modifying instead the entire previous sentence. And yet others can be found serving various nominal functions.

Heavy Subjects

In theory, an English noun phrase can be infinitely long, with postmodifiers tacked on to each other in an endless chain, like one of those fractions whose decimal points stretch out into infinity--the technical term here is **recursive**. We can take a childish pleasure in such sentences:

(1) This is the cat that ate the rat that ate the ...

In sentence (1), the chain of restrictive relative clauses is set at the end of the sentence. When chains of this sort come earlier in the sentence, however, they are a good deal less lovable. Because English has denuded itself of most inflections, our ability to understand English sentences depends a good deal on word order. Excessively long noun phrases, especially those which are or include clauses, can interfere with our ability to do so. They are particularly noxious in the subject position, since they contain verbs which we might mistake for the main verbs, and even more so when combined with smaller predicates, like "is here" in sentence (2):

(2) The handyman who cleans our gutters out every fall is here.

Extraposed Relative Clauses.

In sentences like (2), a big fat subject sits atop a poor little predicate, squashing the life out of it. English allows us to **extrapose** the relative clauses which create the problem, moving them to a new position at the end of the main clause, where they may or may not sound better:

(3) The **handyman** is here who cleans our gutters out every fall.

(4) An **idea** occurs to me which with God's blessing may put us right.

(5) Now some **players** are available which play both CDs and MP3 formats.

Extraposition of relative clauses out of subject noun phrases is the most common form. Extraposition from elsewhere in a clause is acceptable but often at least as awkward as leaving an over-sized relative clause where it is. As sentence (6) shows, relative clauses can even be extraposed out of oversized indirect objects of sentences with ditransitive verbs like give, though sentence (7) seems a preferable solution in this case and others involving over-sized indirect objects:

(6) The city gave the company a big tax break which promised to build a manufacturing plant here.

(7) The city gave a big tax break to the company which promised to build a manufacturing plant here.

The verb in sentence (8) is a complex transitive verb, taking both a direct object and an object complement. Extraposition out of an over-sized direct object, as in sentence (9), makes the

object complement (happy less of an after-thought but may not make the sentence more readable. Another stylistic option in such cases is to invert the normal order of the direct object, as in sentence (10):

- (8) She will surely make the man who marries her happy.
- (9) She will surely make the man happy who marries her.
- (10) She will surely make happy the man who marries her.

In speech we sometimes tack on **extraposed relative clauses** as a sort of afterthought. In writing, they sound formal at best and just plain awkward at worst. Use them only when they are obviously clearer than the more usual sentence order.

Sentential Relative Clauses.

Extraposed relative clauses can sometimes be confused with another kind of relative clause which occurs at the end of sentences and needs no nearby noun phrase antecedent, the **sentential relative clause**. These relatives modify the entire preceding clause, not just some noun phrase in it. They serve the function of the disjuncts (or sentence adverbials) we discussed under "Adverbials," commenting on the preceding statement, rather than being part of it. While most kinds of sentence adverbials come at the beginning of a sentence, these sentential relative clauses come after the clause to which they refer. They are usually punctuated with a comma or dash in front of them. Because clauses aren't living creatures, these relatives are headed by "which" rather than "who." The usual form is the simple "which", as in sentence (11) below. It can also be used in various combination forms as in sentence (12) or even sentence (13):

- (11) The lark is on the wing, **which is normal for larks**.
- (12) He may yet be elected president, **in which case I am moving to Canada**.
- (13) They lost badly, **which result pleased me no end**.

Even though these clauses are rather loosely attached to the sentences they comment on, they still have the form of dependent clauses. In a script, one might punctuate sentence (11) above as follows:

- (14) The lark is on the wing. ***Which is normal for larks.**

The punctuation in (14) would tell the speaker to take a big pause between "wing" and "which," treating the sentential relative clause as a mildly humorous afterthought. In formal writing, however, the relative clause cannot stand by itself as a sentence, and having it do so, constitutes a **sentence fragment**.

Nominal Relative Clauses

To make life just a bit harder, relative clauses can also serve nominal functions in a sentence, with the important exception of those headed by the relative pronoun "that," since these would create too much confusion with other kinds of *that*-clauses.

- (15) I know **who my friends are**.
- (16) I wonder **which excuse he will give this time**.

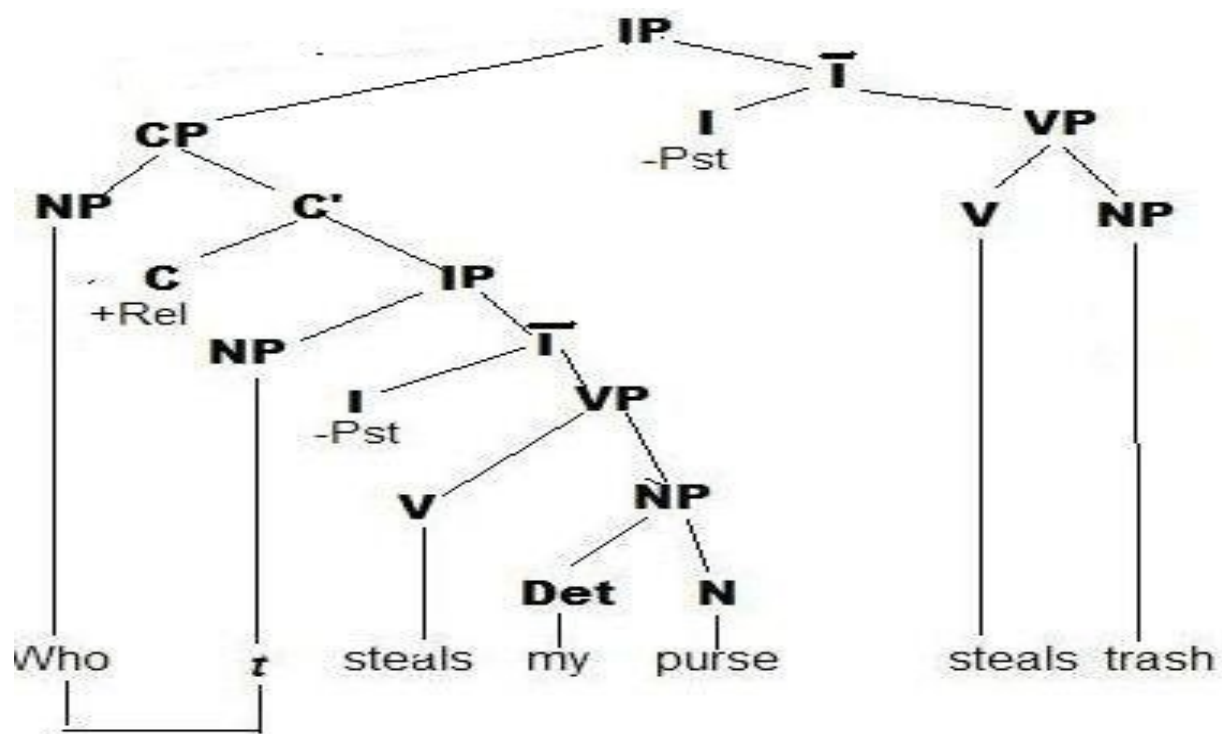
Verbs vary in the kinds of nominal clauses they allow. These variations are fairly arbitrary. They belong less to the syntax of the language than to the usage of particular verbs, and we evidently learn them as we learn the verbs themselves. This is the kind of idiomatic usage that can pose problems for non-native speakers

Nominal relatives (also known as **free relatives**) can also occur as subjects of sentences. In such cases, it is not hard to distinguish them from other uses of relative clauses, but they can be mistaken for questions, since the *WH*-pronouns used in relative clauses can serve as

interrogative pronouns as well. Relative pronouns like “whoever” and “whichever” may be somewhat clearer in some such cases.

- (17) Who steals my purse steals trash.
 (18) Which team will win is hard to say.
 (19) Whoever steals my purse steals trash.
 (20) Whichever team will win is fine by me.

A phrase structure tree for a nominal relative looks just like the phrase structure tree for a normal postmodifying relative clause, except that it now occupies a sentence position normally occupied by a noun phrase:



ADVANCED CLAUSES: WHAT YOU SHOULD NOW BE ABLE TO DO

- Correctly analyze sentences which include extraposed relative clauses, sentential relatives, or nominal relatives.
- Recognize and correct sentence fragments resulting from punctuating sentential or other relatives as complete sentences in themselves.
- Be able to say whether a given relative clause is a postmodifying relative clause in a noun phrase, an extraposed relative clause, a sentential relative clause, even when it occurs at the end of a sentence.
- Be able to distinguish between sentence-opening nominal clause subjects and interrogative WH-questions.

OTHER CLAUSES AND NOMINALS

So far we have looked at three kinds of clause-like structures that can also serve as nominals—*that*-clauses, gerund phrases, and nominal relatives. This does not exhaust our list of clausal nominals. Also included of additional *wh*-clauses, some noun clauses which closely resembles *that*-clauses, and infinitive phrases.

Finite and Non-Finite Clauses

It might seem strange to include gerund phrases among the “clausal” nominals, since they often have no subject and never have a tense. Even so, they are clearly sentence-like structures; even when there is no overt subject, we can see an implied subject and an assertion being made, so that underneath sentence (1) lies some kind of expression like (2):

- (1) I love **eating cheeseburgers**.
- (2) I love (**I eat cheeseburgers**).

When there is a surface subject for our gerund, the underlying sentence is even clearer:

- (3) **Brenda's kissing the bus driver** bothered her boyfriend.
- (4) (**Brenda kissed the bus driver**) bothered her boyfriend.

In some cases, we can replace gerund phrase like that in sentence (3) with a *that*-clause that shows the tense we only infer in sentence (3) itself:

- (5) **That Brenda kissed the bus driver** bothered her boyfriend.

Clauses that have a tensed verb are called **finite** clauses; those without are called **non-finite** clauses. Declarative sentences must be finite clauses, but the subordinate clauses they contain can be either finite or non-finite. Of the dependent clauses we have looked at so far, subordinate clauses, *that*-clauses, and relative clauses are all generally finite clauses, while gerunds and gerund phrases are non-finite by nature.

It should not be surprising to hear that, of the additional clauses we are about to discuss, infinitives are non-finite.

WH-Clauses

We have seen that the *WH*-pronouns which introduce relative clauses can also introduce nominal relative clauses. In the same way, the other *WH*-pronouns which introduce interrogative sentences can also introduce finite clauses serving as subjects and objects. These *WH*-clauses are often grouped with *that*-clauses as noun clauses. All of the interrogative pronouns can be used this way, including *how*, which again counts as an honorary *WH*-pronoun:

- (6) **How to get there** puzzles me.
- (7) I don't know **how to get there**.
- (8) **What happens in Vegas stays** in Vegas.
- (9) I told your momma **what you did in Vegas**.
- (10) **When Ted came here** is a state secret.
- (11) No one knows **when Ted came here**.
- (12) **Where it's gone to** puzzles me.
- (13) I don't know **where it's gone to**.

These clauses can also appear occasionally as complements of prepositions, though we will later explain most such cases as resulting from multi-word verbs:

- (14) He is aware of **what happened**.
- (15) The committee looked at **why Ted came**.

Many of the same WH-pronouns can be used as subordinating conjunctions introducing adverbial clauses, and some can serve as relative adverbs introducing postmodifying relative clauses in noun phrases. In sentence (16) below, the *when*-clause is a subordinate clause. In sentence (17), it is a relative clause, but in sentence (18) it is a noun complement equivalent to a *that*-clause serving the same function.

- (16) The skies will be brighter **when he comes**.
 (17) The time **when he will come** is not known.
 (18) I have no idea **when he will come**.

Conditional Complementizers

That is the most common complementizer introducing complement clauses (noun clauses), but it is not the only one. The two which most resemble it in behavior are the **conditional complementizers** “whether” and “if.” “Whether” can be used as a subject, as in sentence (19); as a direct object, as in sentence (20); or even as a noun complement, as in sentence (21):

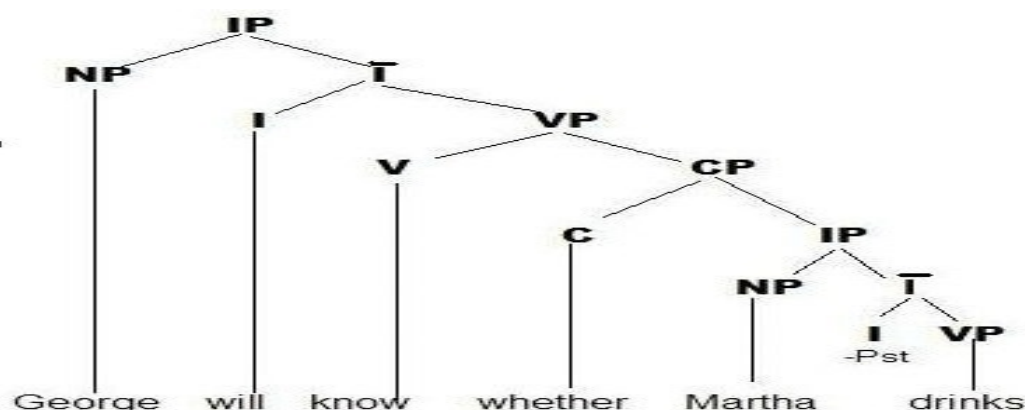
- (19) **Whether I am coming or not** is uncertain.
 (20) He wants to know **whether I am coming**.
 (21) I have no idea **whether I am coming**.

“If” could be used in all of the sentences above, though “whether” is preferable in all of them. *If*-clauses are least objectionable as direct objects:

- (22) He wants to know **if I am coming**.

Even in the direct object position, there is the risk that the reader (or even the writer) will mistake the complementizer “if” for one being used as a subordinating conjunction. Remember never to put a comma in front of a complement clause, as one might in front of a subordinate conditional clause.

Phrase structure trees for conditional complementizers look just like those for *that*-clauses, with the conditional complementizer taking the place of *that* in the head position of a CP.



Infinitives

One can also think of the word “for” as operating as a complementizer when it introduces infinitive phrases with subjects. The “for-to” construction is a very old one, but it is currently used only with a few verbs and even then is often deleted, as in the sample sentences below. With or without the preceding for, a pronoun subject of an infinitive phrase is in the objective case:

- (23) We need **for him to take charge** => We need **him to take charge**.
 (24) We asked **for them to be our guides** => We asked **them to be our guides**.

The most usual use of a “for-to” complement clause is as the direct object of a verb, as in sentences (23) and (24). If such a clause is the subject of the sentence, however, the complementizer “for” is mandatory; sentence (25) is acceptable, but sentence (26) is not:

- (25) **For him to act that way** just burns me up.
 (26) ***Him to act that way** just burns me up.

“For-to” complements use the base form of the verb—that is, they are non-finite. Whether or not preceded by the complementizer “for,” the “to” which comes before the verb is not really functioning as a traditional preposition but as an **infinitive marker** and the “to”+verb combination is called an **infinitive**. When they have complements, they are called **infinitive phrases**.

Infinitives and infinitive phrases are particularly common as direct objects, whether with implied subjects as in sentence (27), or specified subjects as in sentence (28). Sentence (29) has infinitives as both its subject and its subject complement.

- (27) She wants **to dance with George**.
 (28) I want **him to dance with her**.
 (29) **To give** is **to receive**.

Such phrases also occur as noun complements, as in sentences (30) and (31), and adjective complements, as in sentence (32):

- (30) His desire **to kill** was obvious.
 (31) His desire **to kill the rat** was obvious.
 (32) You are too honest **to live**.

The infinitive expression in sentence (33) also looks like a complement within an adjective phrase, but it might better be read as some kind of conditional adverbial modifying the verb; notice that it can be moved to the front, as in sentence (34)

- (34) You must be honest **to live outside the law**.
 (35) **To live outside the law** you must be honest

Placing an adverbial where it separates the infinitive marker to from the affected verb risks distracting the reader. Most handbooks therefore advise against such **split infinitives** (e.g., “to emphatically state”). Although it makes more sense than many, the rule against split infinitives is one of the more widely reviled and ignored handbook rules. It is worth at least checking to see whether there is not some way of putting the sentence which is equally clear or even clearer.

Some Other Non-Finite Clauses

Some verbs take non-finite clauses (tenseless clauses) without any infinitive marker. The clause's subject remains in the objective case if it is a pronoun, and the tense does not vary. The examples in sentences (36) and (37) are sometimes called **bare infinitives**:

- (36) We saw **George go down the stairs**.
 (37) We watched **him leave**.

That-clauses can also be tenseless when expressing hypothetical or wished-for situations, though their subjects remain in the nominative case. The tenseless verb in such cases is interpreted by grammarians as a sign of **subjunctive mood**, but its meaning often seems interchangeable with equivalent infinitive expressions, as sentences (38) and (39) show:

- (38) The police had asked **that he go**.
 (39) The police had asked **him to go**.

An Alternative View of Object Complements

We earlier encountered complex transitive verbs, whose object complements (or object predicatives) had the same relation to a direct object as a subject complement (or subject predicative) would to the subject of a linking verb. Object complements can be noun phrases, as in sentence (40), or adjectives, as in sentence (41)

- (40) She considered George **a dork**.
 (41) She thought him **silly**.

One way of thinking about such expressions is to think of them as infinitive clauses that have lost their “to be” by a process like the *WHis*-DELETION we looked at earlier:

- (42) She considered **George to be a dork**.
 (43) She thought **George to be silly**.

Deriving sentences like (40) and (41) from sentences like (42) and (43) would allow us to eliminate the complex transitive as a sentence type, along with other hard to remember terms, like object complement and object predicative. The time will come. In the meantime, this alternative will not be on our tests.

ADVANCED CLAUSES: MORE YOU SHOULD NOW BE ABLE TO DO

- Analyze sentences containing any form of clausal nominal.
- Say what sentence function a given clausal nominal is serving.
- Distinguish the use of “to” as an infinitive marker from cases where it is a preposition taking a noun phrase as its complement

EXTRAPOSITION AND OTHER MOVEMENTS

Clausal nominals lead to the same kind of “heavy subjects” that we deplored in discussing subject noun phrases with long relative clauses attached, and they are dealt with in a similar fashion, by moving them to the end of the sentence. The term **extraposition** is used for this process, as it is for extraposed relative clauses.

Extrapositing *That*-Clauses

When used by itself, “extraposition” particularly refers to the extraposition of *that*-clauses. As subjects, *that*-clauses are probably more often extraposed than not. Unlike postmodifying relative clauses, *that*-clauses leave behind more than an empty trace in a phrase structure tree. When we extrapose a *that*-clause, its original position is marked by a pronoun, almost always “it.” This token pronoun can be called an **anticipatory it** (or **preparatory it**) because it comes before the clause to which it refers. When it replaces a nominal subject, we can also consider it a kind of **dummy subject**, since it adds no semantic information to the sentence.

- (1) **That you care** pleases me=>**It** pleases me **that you care**.
 (2) **That this will do any good** is far from clear =>
 It is far from clear **that this will do any good**.
 (3) **That you came to inform on your parents** is good=>
 It is good **that you came to inform on your parents**.

When it is used to stand in for an extraposed nominal clause, it can also be called an **expletive**

(or **syntactic expletive**). It can also be used for “there” as a dummy subject, since its implication is that the word fills a syntactic role but contributes no semantic meaning to the sentence. We'll avoid that use of the term, since “expletive” is in common usage a term for obscene and profane words, as in “expletive deleted,” especially as interjections. The terms **pleonastic it** or **prop it** can also be used for all cases in which “it” substitutes for an extraposed nominal. The main advantage of such terms is that they can be applied to those rare cases in which extraposition occurs out of other nominal functions, as when clausal nominals might otherwise create confusion as direct objects in complex transitive predicates:

- (4) ?She considered **that George was a loser** was obvious=>
She considered it obvious **that George was a loser**.

Required Extraposition of *That*-Clauses

Some verbs which can take *that*-clauses as subjects almost seem to require extraposition when they do so, as in sentences (5) and (6):

- (5) ?**That I have been led up the garden path** occurs to me=>
It occurs to me **that I have been led up the garden path**.
(6) ***That nothing happened** turns out=>It turns out **that nothing happened**.

A more complicated question is the use of *that*-clause subjects with the verbs “happen” and “seem.” Extraposition when these verbs are used as linking verbs follows normal patterns, as in sentences (7) and (8):

- (7) **That we will win seems** certain=>It seems certain **that we will win**.
(8) **That judges err happens** in life=>It happens in life **that judges err**.

But *that*-clauses also appear as the complements of “happen” and “seem” in sentences like (9) and (10), where assuming that they have been extraposed from a subject position requires us to imagine some very odd original sentences, with “happen” and “seem” as intransitive verbs:

- (9) ?? **That the woman is my wife** happens=>
It happens **that the woman is my wife**.
(10) ??**That you have been badly mistaken** seems=>
It seems **that you have been badly mistaken**.

Rather than treat such cases as extraposition, it might be better to see the subject “it” in these sentences as the kind of dummy subject that one finds used with the so-called **impersonal verbs** like “rain” and “snow”:

- (11) It rained last night.
(12) It is snowing hard.

The “it” in such sentences does not imply that there is some entity which does the raining. It is a mere dummy subject (or pleonastic “it” or whatever) stuck in to provide a subject for a sentence that would otherwise violate the English insistence on having subjects.

That-DELETION with Extraposition

Unlike most extraposed nominals, *that*-clauses which have been extraposed can undergo *that*-DELETION, yielding sentences like these:

- (13) It pleases me **you care**.
(14) It is far from clear **this will do any good**.
(15) It is good **you came to inform on your parents**.

This is true even with the uses of “happen” and “seem” which may or may not be examples of extraposition as such.

- (16) It happens **the woman is my wife**.
(17) It seems **you have been badly mistaken**.

Extrapolation of Other Finite Clauses

WH-clauses other than nominal *relatives* are sometimes counted as “noun clauses” along with *that*-clauses, and like *that*-clauses, they can be extraposed, leaving behind the same kind of dummy subject “it” as do extraposed *that*-clauses. The results are not always graceful:

- (18) How to get there beats me=>?It beats me how to get there.
 (19) What he meant by that is unclear=>It is unclear what he meant by that.
 (20) When he will come back is not known=>
 _____ It is not known when he will come back.
 (21) Where he had been was a puzzle=>?It was a puzzle where he had been.

When **nominal relative clauses** undergo extraposition, they are also treated very much like extraposed *that*-clauses, but other pronouns can be used with *who*-clauses, as in sentence (22). Such structures are less common than extraposed *that*-clauses.

- (22) He steals trash who steals my purse.
 (23) It makes little difference which dog wins this race

Clauses with **conditional complementizers** can also be extraposed. Doing so with *if*-clauses, however, risks confusion with subordinate constructions and probably should be avoided if at all possible. “Whether” would be the preferable complementizer in sentence (25):

- (24) It is unclear whether I am coming.
 (25) ?It is not clear if I am invited.

Extrapolation of Infinitives and Gerunds

For-to constructions and regular infinitive phrases can be extraposed almost as easily as *that*-clauses:

- (26) It is important to floss every day.
 (27) It hurts me for him to say those things.

One hesitates to apply the term extraposition to the movement of gerund phrases, but in informal speech, at least, one can hear sentences which seem to result from that process, usually of gerund phrases with overt subjects. The gerund phrase which has been moved should be set off with commas:

- (28) It is good for me, my walking the dog every morning.

Cleft Sentences

Extraposed nominals can easily be confused with **cleft sentences**, another way for a writer to single out an element of a sentence for special focus. In the traditional *it*-cleft sentence, the noun-phrase to be stressed is placed after an *it*-subject and a form of *be*, while the rest of the sentence is placed in a relative clause. If we start with a sentence like sentence (29) below, we can put even more stress on the subject by using an *it*-cleft like sentence (30). Sentence (31) uses an *it*-cleft to stress an object noun phrase, and sentence (32) applies *that*-DELETION to sentence (31):

- (29) George wanted to sell my old tennis shoes.
 (30) It was George who wanted to sell my old tennis shoes.
 (31) It was my old tennis shoes that George wanted to sell.
 (32) It was my old tennis shoes George wanted to sell.

One can also use an *it*-cleft to highlight a recipient or an adverbial. In such cases, “it” may be a prepositional phrase, an infinitive phrase, or even a subordinate clause that is singled out, as in the following cleft sentences:

- (33) It was to Martha that George wanted to sell my old tennis shoes.
 (34) It was to raise money for charity **that George wanted to sell my old tennis shoes**.
 (35) It was when he ran out of coffee money **that George decided to sell my old tennis shoes**.

Another kind of cleft sentence is known as the **WH-cleft** or **pseudo-cleft** sentence. In this structure, the phrase to be singled out becomes a subject complement following a form of *be*, and the rest of the sentence is put into a WH-clause, as in the sentences below. When the *it* is the original subject that is singled out, the *one(s) who*, as in sentence (37), may be preferable to a simple *who*-clause:

- (37) **What George wanted to sell** were my old tennis shoes.
 (38) **The one who wanted to sell my old tennis shoes** was George.

The order can be reversed as well, producing a **reverse WH-cleft** or **inverted pseudo-cleft** sentence. In such structures the singled-out phrase itself is the subject and a form of *be* is followed by a WH-clause. Use of *the one(s) who* with subjects remains preferable, as in sentence (40):

- (39) My old tennis shoes were **what George wanted to sell**.
 (40) George was **the one who wanted to sell my old tennis shoes**.

As a subject, the *it* of an *it*-cleft is singular and takes a singular verb. The *it*, after all, anticipates a clause and is itself semantically empty. In other cleft forms, the verb agrees with the new subject and thus varies. The same is true of another variant of the cleft sentence, in which appropriate demonstrative pronouns are used instead of *it*. This variation seems to lack an agreed-upon term to identify it by. It looks like this:

- (41) **Those** were my old tennis shoes **that George wanted to sell**.
 (42) **That** was George **who wanted to sell my old tennis shoes**

Existential There-Sentences

The so-called **existential there-sentences** have a structure very similar to *it*-clefts. “Be” is the original verb of such sentences, which begin with “there is” or “there are,” followed by the original subject. Such sentences affirm against potential doubt the existence of something with a particular quality. These sentences are an important exception to the usual rules about verb agreement. The verb continues to agree with the original subject, even though “there” is treated as the grammatical subject for purposes of question formation, whether by INVERSION or by TAG-FORMATION.

- (43) There is a fly in my soup.
 (44) There are flies in my soup.
 (45) Is there a fly in my soup?
 (46) Are there flies in my soup?
 (47) There is a fly in my soup, isn't there?
 (48) There are flies in my soup, aren't there?

When we use contractions like “there's” it is not unusual to violate the rule that the verb agrees with the original subject, particularly in speech, with results like sentence (20) below:

- (49) There's two flies in my soup.

This simply applies the general rule for agreement rather than the exception normally made for existential *there*-sentences. Like contractions themselves, one should avoid this usage in formal writing.

Poetic Inversions

For completeness, we should note that a subject can also be displaced from its usual position by inverting the normal subject order. When the verb is a form of “be,” and the subject complement cannot be mistaken for a subject noun phrase, one can simply switch the subject with the subject complement, and this is the most common form. We can often be sure that inversion has occurred because the verb continues to agree with the original subject:

- (50) On the bench **is** Chris Webber.
- (51) At night **are** some great parties.
- (52) Very silly **are** your questions.

Inversions of the normal subject-predicate order used to be relatively common with the verb “have” used to indicate possession, and we can still understand sentences like (53):

- (53) Two loves **have** I.

Moving a direct object in front of the subject for focus without inversion is also possible, though it is advisable only if the verb is such that no confusion is possible. In sentence (54) it should be clear that “the prime minister” is the one assassinated—that is, the direct object:

- (54) **The prime minister** they simply assassinated.

ADVANCED CLAUSES: MORE YOU SHOULD NOW BE ABLE TO DO

- Correctly identify all extraposed clauses, cleft sentences, existential sentences, and poetic inversions.
- Distinguish “there” as the syntactical subject of a sentence from other purely adverbial uses.

CONJUNCTIONS AND CONJUNCTIVE ADVERBS

Coordinating conjunctions can sometimes create problems for subject-verb agreement or pronoun reference, but the main hazards posed by conjunctions in general are in punctuation.

Some users feel strongly that certain widely used practices are simply unacceptable. It is an open question how much one should be restrained by such shibboleths. The advice offered here is liberal when dealing with coordinating conjunctions and otherwise rather conservative, but one’s practice should respect any known stylistic preferences of one’s editors and readers.

More on Coordinating Conjunctions

The main **coordinating conjunctions** (also called **coordinators**) are *and*, *but*, and *or*, and you should know them. The only other words which get labelled coordinating conjunctions are *for*, *nor*, *so*, and *yet*. The basic coordinators, at least, can be used to join any two things of the same kind, from individual parts of speech to independent clauses, and all coordinators can link independent clauses:

- (1) George **and** Homer missed the deer, **and** it disappeared.

The first use of “and” in (1) is joining together two nouns so that they serve together as a subject. This kind of structure is called a **compound subject**. We can join together full noun phrases this way as well, as in the compound subject of sentence (2) or the **compound direct object** of sentence (3):

- (2) The president and his brother missed the deer.
- (3) The deer escaped the president and his brother.

For purposes of subject-verb agreement, compound subjects joined by “and” are almost always treated as plural. Writers are often tempted to use a singular verb by mistake, especially when the subjects come complete with modifiers that can make us lose track of where we are. Sentence (4) is wrong; sentence (5) corrects it:

- (4) *His knowledge of the subject and his ability to express that knowledge **has** improved in this course.
 (5) His knowledge of the subject and his ability to express that knowledge **have** improved in this course.

An exception to this rule occurs when the two singular nouns joined by “and” are preceded by each or every. In such cases, always use a singular verb:

- (6) **Every** man and woman **has** certain rights.

When coordinating conjunctions other than *and* are used in a compound sentence, the verb agrees in number with the noun phrase closest to it:

- (7) Neither she nor her friends **have** any manners to speak of.

Punctuating Coordinating Conjunctions

Beginning a sentence with *and*, *but*, or *or* is acceptable in Standard English if what follows otherwise meets the standards for an independent clause, though it has been condemned so often in school handbooks that many people think of it as an error. Since this group includes many instructors, even in English, it can be safest to avoid such structures in college writing. The usual rule for punctuating coordinating conjunctions is that we use a comma in front of the conjunction when they are joining independent clauses. It is never wrong and always safe to use a comma in such cases, especially when using less common coordinating conjunctions like *for*, *so*, and *yet*. If the clauses being joined are fairly short, the comma is not needed for clarity and can be omitted unless one is writing for a purist.

Even when the phrases being joined are very long, we should generally not use a comma in front of the conjunction when two items joined together are not independent clauses. A sentence with a compound predicate like (8) does not need a comma in front of it, but one is perfectly appropriate in a compound sentence like (9). Breaking up a compound subject with a comma, as in sentence (10) is a serious error:

- (8) The vice president missed the deer he was aiming at **and** hit his friend in the calf.
 (9) Homer missed the deer, **and** the vice president shot Homer.
 (10) *The president of the company, **and** his brother were shooting deer.

Practice varies and confusion reigns on punctuating **items in a series**. The general rule in American usage is that commas separate all items in a series, including the last, even if preceded by “and.” British usage often omits a comma before “and” in such cases, and the omission is standard in American newspaper usage and when the “and” is represented by an ampersand (“&”). Although a comma sometimes makes things a bit clearer, the existence of alternative practices makes it seem pointless to insist too strenuously on their use. When the items in a series have internal commas themselves, it is customary to use semi-colons to separate the series. The object, again, is to make it clear to the reader what is and is not included in the series.

Some Minor Uses of Coordinating Conjunctions

The Coordinating conjunction “or” is often used to ask **alternative questions**, where the listener or reader is asked to choose between two alternatives. This can be done with coordinate

constructions at various levels:

- (11) Do you want to stop now, **or** shall we go on to Chicago?
- (12) Will George be doing this, **or** Martha?
- (13) Shall we walk to the store **or** drive there?

When a conjunction is paired with another word or phrase to help coordinate two units, the two are sometimes referred to as **correlative conjunctions**:

- (14) It's time for her to choose **either** him **or** me.
- (15) **Neither** George **nor** his brother are good shots.
- (15) **Not only** have I an earache, **but** my wife has left me.
- (16) **Both** his name **and** his hair are false.
- (17) **As** Kenosha goes, **so** goes Southeastern Wisconsin.

We might note that "so" counts as a coordinating conjunction when it is used to indicate simultaneous action as in sentence (17) above, but can be considered a subordinating conjunction when it is interchangeable with "so that." Some writers strongly prefer "so that" in such cases, but either can be found in plenty of Standard English examples.

Similar pairs occur with subordinating constructions, though these pairs are less apt to be termed "correlative":

- (18) **If** you will be my bodyguard, **then** I will be your long lost friend.

More on Subordinating Conjunctions

English has only a handful of coordinating conjunctions, but a much larger set of subordinating conjunctions (also called subordinate conjunctions or subordinators. A few of these are actually two or three word phrases. In general, the clauses they introduce (subordinate or dependent) clauses function as adjunct adverbials within the predicate, with some subordinators serving more than one kind of adverbial function. Here are some more examples

- (19) **As** she entered the room, my eyes grew misty. [TIME]
- (20) Forgive us **as** we forgive others. [CONDITIONAL]
- (21) He danced **as if** his life depended on it. [MANNER]
- (22) I laughed **because** I couldn't help myself. [CAUSAL]
- (23) She will come **if** I ask her to. [CONDITIONAL]
- (24) I work **in order that** I may eat. [PURPOSE]
- (25) I labor **lest** I starve. [CONDITIONAL]
- (26) It's been lonely **since** you left. [TIME]
- (27) I watered the flowers, **since** you asked me to. [PURPOSE]
- (28) I love you, **though** perhaps I shouldn't. [CONCESSIVE]
- (29) We'll stay **till** they double the score. [TIME]
- (30) It should be soon, **unless** they put in the second-stringers. [CONDITIONAL]
- (31) They attacked **while** we slept. [TIME]

As these examples show, whether such subordinate clauses are set off by commas depends on their length and how important they are to the meaning of the clause they modify. Clauses at the beginning of a sentence are more apt to be set off with a comma at the end than clauses at the end of a sentence. Even if the subordinate clause is very much an afterthought, it should be set off by at least a dash in formal writing, since doing otherwise drives some readers crazy:

- (33) George was angry, **although** he did not say so. [STANDARD]
- (34) George was angry. ***Although** he did not say so. [UNACCEPTABLE]
- (35) George was angry—**although** he did not say so. [ACCEPTABLE]

Other Issues with Subordinate Clauses

Some writers need to use fewer coordinating conjunctions and more subordinating conjunctions. Coordinating conjunctions are all very well when the items joined are truly equal. Often, though, there is some implicit priority involved: one action comes before the other or explains the other or contrasts significantly with the other. Joining such clauses with *and* asks the reader to do the work. There is an old saying that the difference between a mere chronicle and a history is the difference between "this happened and this happened" and "this happened, so this happened, so this happened." Consider helping the reader out by making the relationships clear.

Subordinating conjunctions can occasionally head clauses that serve as disjuncts, those sentence adverbials which comment on the sentence's statement rather than forming part of it:

- (36) **Although I wouldn't want to boast**, I was right again.
 (37) **If I can speak frankly**, George is stupid.

Many prepositions which head prepositional phrases serving as time adverbials are also used as subordinators or subordinate conjunctions to introduce adverbial clauses of time. We may return to this question again, but in the meantime one needs to distinguish between such pairs as these:

- (38) He kissed her **after the dance**. He kissed her **after the dance ended**.
 (39) She was shy **before the dance**. She was shy **before the dance started**.
 (40) We have been waiting **since noon**. We have been waiting **since she left**.
 (41) We will wait **until noon**. We will wait **until she returns**.

Conjunctive Adverbs

Along with adjuncts and disjuncts, we also have conjuncts. The adverbs and adverbials among them are a particular nuisance, since **conjunctive adverbs** like "therefore" or "however" are easily confused with true conjunctions but are supposed to be punctuated differently. These "adverbs" are really another separate category, a closed list of words, some of which serve no other function. Conjunctive adverbs link two items together in meaning, but they are not considered strong enough to join two independent clauses together with only a comma, as true coordinating conjunctions do. There must be a period or semi-colon between the two clauses, as in sentences (42) and (43):

- (42) The vice president missed the deer; **however**, he did manage to wound Homer.
 (43) The vice president missed the deer. **However**, he did manage to wound Homer

Since "however" is interchangeable in meaning with "but" in these sentences, it is tempting to punctuate it in the same way, but sentence (44) is non-standard:

- (44) *The VP missed the deer, **however** he did manage to wound Homer.

The problem in sentence (44) is two-fold: the independent clauses need to be separated by a period or semi-colon, and "however" needs to be set off with commas.

The first of these rules is in flux and the second can sometimes be ignored to advantage, but misuse is stigmatized sufficiently that following the rules as given here is the safest course.

Even worse than mispunctuating conjunctive adverbs themselves is punctuating true conjunctions as if they were conjunctive adverbs, following them with a comma. This is another result of punctuating by one's breathing without the intervention of one's mind:

- (45) *The VP missed the deer, **but**, he managed to wound Homer.
 (46) The VP missed the deer. ***Although**, he managed to wound Homer.

One way to identify what is and is not a conjunctive adverb is to try moving it around in the clause in which it appears. Like many adverbs, conjunctive adverbs can generally be moved to the middle or end of a clause. Wherever they appear, they need punctuation on either side,

either commas or a comma and period/semi-colon:

- (47) The VP missed the deer; he managed, **moreover**, to wound Homer.
- (48) The VP missed the deer; the deer manage to escape, **therefore**.
- (49) The VP missed the deer. **Furthermore**, he managed to wound Homer.
- (50) The VP missed the deer. He managed, **nevertheless**, to wound Homer.

When one of the clauses joined is a subordinate clause, the conjunctive adverb must still be set off, but the clauses themselves can be joined by a comma:

- (51) When the conjunctive adverb is in the middle of a clause, **incidentally**, it needs commas both before and after.
- (52) When the vice president missed the deer, he managed to wound Homer, **anyway**.

“However” and “therefore” are probably the most common conjunctive adverbs. The sentences above illustrate some more. Some others are *accordingly*, *besides*, *consequently*, *indeed*, *instead*, *likewise*, *meanwhile*, *namely*, *nonetheless*, *now*, *similarly*, *still*, and *thus*. There are also various lists available on the web. If the movement test does not enable you to distinguish them in practice, engage in another feat of memorization, calling on the same inner resources which enable you to remember all the words to, say, "Wasting Away in Margaritaville" when barely aware of your surroundings.

ADVANCED CLAUSES: STILL MORE STUFF YOU CAN NOW DO

- Identify subordinate clauses and say what their sentence function is
- Distinguish conjunctions from conjunctive adverbs and recognize punctuation errors resulting from a failure to do so