

STRUCTURE IT USING NOUN CLAUSES

Situation

John and Susan work in the same office. Another colleague, Larry, had asked them to meet with him on Monday morning at 7:00 a.m. to discuss a pressing issue.

It is now 7:20 a.m. on Monday. John and Susan are in the office. Larry has not shown up or called. **Read the conversation** that John and Susan are having:

John: Where is Larry?

Susan: I don't know where he is.

John: When did he leave the house?

Susan: I can't tell you when he left. I called his place five minutes ago, but no one answered.

John: He must be on his way then. How does he get to the office? Does he drive?

Susan: I've never asked him how he gets here.

John: Why don't we ask his secretary what time she expects him?

Susan: None of the secretaries get in before 8:30. I'm sure we're the only ones here this early.

John: I hope Larry's okay. I'm getting kind of worried about what might have happened to him.

Susan: He's probably stuck in traffic. Why he wanted to meet so early is a mystery to me!

Function of a Noun Clause

The underlined statements in the preceding conversation are all examples of **noun clauses**.

Noun clauses are used in a sentence to describe actions which are **subordinate** to the main action of the sentence.

Let's look closely at some of John's and Susan's statements:

John: When did he leave the house?

Susan: I don't know when he left.

- The **action** expressed in *John's question* is **leave**.
- The **main action** expressed in *Susan's response* is **know**.

"When he left" describes an **action** which is **subordinate** to the **main action** (**know**) of the sentence.

A noun clause gets its name from the function it serves.

A **noun** is the name of a **person, place**, or **thing**.

Examples of nouns are:

- my boss
- the affidavit
- a witness

A **noun** can **function** as:

- (1) **subject** of a verb
 - **His reasons** are a mystery to me.
- (2) **object** of a (transitive) verb
 - I don't know **his location**.
- (3) **object** of a preposition
 - I'm worried **about my colleague**.

A **clause** is composed of a **subject** and a **verb**.

Examples of clauses are:

- She knows
- My boss went
- The client isn't coming

A noun clause has the same functions as a noun.

A **noun clause** can function as:

- (1) the **subject** of a verb
- (2) the **object** of a verb
- (3) the **object** of a preposition

For example:

- (1) *subject* of a verb
His reasons are a mystery to me.
Why he wanted to meet is a mystery to me.
- (2) *object* of a verb
I don't know **his location**.
I don't know **where he is**.
- (3) *object* of a preposition
I'm worried about **my colleague**.
I'm worried about **what might have happened to him**.

In each of the above examples, the **noun** has been **replaced** by a **description** of that noun.

The **description** is expressed by means of a **subject** and a **verb**, that is, by means of a **clause**.

Form of a Noun Clause

As explained earlier, noun clauses function in the sentence to describe actions which are **subordinate** to the main action.

Therefore, a **noun clause must be introduced by a subordinating conjunction.**

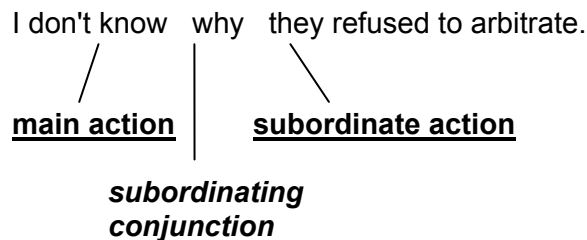
A *conjunction* is a word that joins two actions. And and but are typical *conjunctions*.

For example:

She leaves work *and* picks up her kids from school.
He understands almost everything, *but* he has a hard time expressing himself.

The **subordinating conjunction** joins a **subordinate action** to the **main action**.

For example:



The **first word** of the noun clause must be a **subordinating conjunction**.

Because most noun clauses describe *who, what, when, where, whose, which, and how*, the **subordinating conjunctions** used to **introduce noun clauses** are almost always **WH-words**.

For example:

They can't remember **where they put that file**.

- (1) The **wh-word** indicates the **kind of information** the noun clause contains:
location = **where**.
- (2) The **subject** of the noun clause **must follow** the **subordinating conjunction**:
where they.
- (3) The **verb** of the noun clause **follows** the **subject**, just as in any other clause:
where they put

NOTE

Sometimes the **subordinator** is used as the **subject** of the **noun clause**. For example:

I can't remember **who told me that**.

I'm very interested in **what happened**.

In these instances, the verb **follows** the wh-word.

REMEMBER Use **sentential** -- *not* interrogative -- word order in noun clauses.

CORRECT: We objected to **what she said**.

INCORRECT: We objected to what did she say.

The **function** of the auxiliary (*do, did*) in the interrogative is to notify the listener (or the reader) that a question is being asked. Information is requested in a question, and the listener/reader must typically provide this information in his/her response.

For example:

Why did he leave the firm?

The listener/reader has to provide an answer:

Because he

However, in the following statement:

I can't tell you **why he left the firm**.

there is no information requested.

Instead

I can't tell you **why he left the firm**.

is equivalent to:

I can't tell you **his reason**.

EXERCISES

Answer the following questions using a noun clause as indicated:

Example:

What did the client say?

I can't discuss **what the client said**.

1. Where are they holding next month's conference?

I don't know _____.

2. When will they be ready for trial?

They haven't told me _____.

3. How much are they claiming in damages?

I still haven't heard _____.

4. Who are their key witnesses?

We'll find out tomorrow _____.

5. Why didn't they include an arbitration clause in that contract?

I can't understand _____.

6. Whose office should we use?

It doesn't matter _____.

7. What is the definition of *materiality* in that jurisdiction?

My associate is checking _____.

YOUR TURN
ANSWER SHEET

1. Where are they holding next month's conference?

I don't know **where they're holding next month's conference.**

2. When will they be ready for trial?

They haven't told me **when they'll be ready for trial.**

3. How much are they claiming in damages?

I still haven't heard **how much they're claiming in damages.**

4. Who are their key witnesses?

We'll find out tomorrow **who their key witnesses are.**

5. Why didn't they include an arbitration clause in that contract?

I can't understand **why they didn't include an arbitration clause in that contract.**

6. Whose office should we use?

It doesn't matter **whose office we use.**

7. What is the definition of *materiality* in that jurisdiction?

My associate is checking **what the definition of *materiality* is in that jurisdiction.**