

32 Subordination

SUBORDINATION: WHAT IT IS

Two complete thoughts may be joined together by using the word *and*, *but*, *or*, *for*, or *nor* and a comma. Such a joining of ideas of equal value is called coordination as explained on Card 7. (A semicolon—see Card 24—is also used to connect sentences of equal value.) Most inexperienced writers use coordination too often because it is an easy and convenient way to avoid very short sentences. They take one sentence and join it to another with a comma and the word *and*.

However, since our thoughts and ideas are not always equal in value, we need to build sentences through *subordination*, in which one idea is made more important than another. In subordination, the major part of the sentence is the one that expresses a complete thought and is considered the more important section; the subordinate section cannot stand alone but relies upon the complete thought and is considered the less important section.

Here is an example of a subordinated sentence: When I was younger, I lived in a ghetto. In that sentence, *I lived in a ghetto* is a complete sentence and can stand alone. *When I was younger*, however, cannot stand alone; it relies upon the complete thought and is the less important section of the sentence.

Since subordination adds variety and smoothness to your writing, you should be able to use it frequently in your compositions. In order to write subordinate word groups, you need to use one of the following words.

| | | |
|-------|---------|---------------|
| who | because | although |
| whose | before | as though |
| which | if | when |
| that | once | whenever |
| after | since | in order that |
| until | so that | while |

1. SUBORDINATION: HOW TO DO IT

- Use one of the subordinating words above.

Example: Although.

- Follow it with a subject-verb word group.

Example: Everyone hates failure.

- Add the subordinator and subject-verb word group to a complete thought. Often the subordinate section appears before the complete thought section.

Example: Although everyone hates failure, no one can succeed all the time.

- In the following examples, the subordinated section is shown in italics: *Once a man lives in a ghetto*, he never forgets it. *Since I started the job*, I have no time for fun.

2. MORE ABOUT SUBORDINATION

- Sometimes the subordinate word group (shown in italics) works very well after the complete thought section. Complete thought: I took the bus. With subordination: I took the bus *even though I was late*.

- Subordinate word groups beginning with *who*, *whose*, *which*, and *that* often come between the subject and verb in a complete thought. Complete thought: My friend works at night. With subordination: My friend *who needs money* works at night.

3. COMMAS AND SUBORDINATION

Subordination requires the correct use of commas. Here are three steps to remember:

- If the subordinate section comes before the rest of the sentence, it is usually followed by a comma. If the subordinate section is very short, you do not have to use a comma:

(1) *Although he had lived on the street all his life*, (comma!) he never grew accustomed to the filth. (2) *After he arrived* (no comma!) the door was closed, or (3) *After he arrived*, (comma!) the door was closed.

- If the subordinate section follows the complete thought in the sentence, do *not* use a comma before the subordinate section (shown here in italics): Everyone gasped *when Bill arrived*.

Exception: Subordinate sections starting with *although* or *though* and coming after the complete thought require commas: Steve closed his eyes, although he was not tired.

- In subordinate sections beginning with *who*, *whose*, *that*, or *which* decide whether the section really identifies some person or object or if it only adds information.
- Use commas to separate a subordinate section beginning with *who*, *whose*, *that*, or *which* if it merely adds information to describe something already identified.
- Do not use commas around the subordinate section if it identifies the word it describes.

Look at this sentence: The girl *who is sitting at the rear* is my sister. Since the word group beginning with *who* is absolutely essential for identifying the girl, use no commas to separate it from the rest of the sentence. If we removed *who is sitting at the rear* there would be no way of identifying the girl. The sentence would read: The girl is my sister. The reader or listener would ask *which girl?*

Now let us change the sentence: The girl in the yellow silk dress, (comma!) *who is sitting at the rear of the room*, (comma!) is my sister. Note that we have now identified the girl by her dress. The fact that she is sitting in the rear of the room is an added piece of information, but not essential to the sentence. If we remove *who is sitting at the rear of the room* we are still left with a perfectly clear and easily identified thought: The girl in the yellow silk dress is my sister.

EXERCISES

On separate paper, write sentences of your own, using the following subordinate word groups.

1. although he failed the test
2. who was caught stealing
3. if he decides to practice
4. that smashed to the floor
5. when winter arrives
6. before you know it