**Sentence Building with Adjective Clauses**

An **adjective clause** is a word group that modifies or describes a noun. Adjective clauses will be used often to show that one idea in a sentence is more important than another—this is called subordination.

Consider how the following sentences might be combined:

My father is a superstitious man.   
He always sets his unicorn traps at night.

One option is to [**coordinate**](http://grammar.about.com/od/c/g/coordterm07.htm)the two sentences:

*My father is a superstitious man, and he always sets his unicorn traps at night.*

When sentences are coordinated in this way, each [main clause](http://grammar.about.com/od/pq/g/participterm.htm) is given equal emphasis.

What if we want to place greater [emphasis](http://grammar.about.com/od/e/g/emphasisterm.htm) on one statement than on another? **We then have the option of reducing the less important statement to an adjective clause.** For example, to emphasize that father sets his unicorn traps at night, we can turn the first main clause into an adjective clause:

My father, *who is a superstitious man*, always sets his unicorn traps at night.

As shown here, the adjective clause does the job of an [adjective](http://grammar.about.com/od/basicsentencegrammar/a/adjadv.htm) and follows the noun that it modifies-- *father*. Like a main clause, an adjective clause contains a [subject](http://grammar.about.com/od/basicsentencegrammar/a/sentenceunit.htm) (in this case, *who* ) and a [verb](http://grammar.about.com/od/basicsentencegrammar/a/sentenceunit.htm) ( *is* ). **But unlike a main clause an adjective clause can't stand alone: it has to follow a noun in a main clause.** For this reason, an adjective clause is considered to be subordinate to the main clause.

1. There are two types of **adjective clauses**:  
     
   "The first type is the [*nonrestrictive*](http://grammar.about.com/od/mo/g/nonrestricterm.htm) or nonessential adjective clause. This clause simply gives extra information about the noun. In the sentence, 'My older brother's car, which he bought two years ago, has already needed many repairs,' the adjective clause, 'which he bought two years ago,' is nonrestrictive or nonessential. It provides extra information.  
     
   "The second type is the [*restrictive*](http://grammar.about.com/od/rs/g/retricterm.htm) or essential adjective clause. It offers essential [information] and is needed to complete the sentence's thought. In the sentence, 'The room that you reserved for the meeting is not ready,' the adjective clause, 'that you reserved for the meeting,' is essential because it restricts which room."  
   (Jack Umstatter, Got Grammar? Wiley, 2007)
2. **The most common adjective clauses begin with one of these**[**relative pronouns**](http://grammar.about.com/od/rs/g/relpronounterm.htm)**: *who, which,* and *that*.** All three pronouns refer to a noun, but *who* refers only to people and *which* refers only to things. *That* may refer to either people or things.

The following sentences show how these pronouns are used to begin adjective clauses:

Mr. Clean, who hates rock music, smashed my electric guitar.   
Mr. Clean smashed my electric guitar, which had been a gift from Vera.   
Mr. Clean smashed the electric guitar that Vera had given me.

In the first sentence, the relative pronoun *who* refers to Mr. Clean, the subject of the main clause. In the second and third sentences, the relative pronouns *which* and *that* refer to *guitar*, the object of the main clause.

**Practice 1: Identifying Adjective Clauses**

Only some of the sentences below contain adjective clauses. If the sentence contains an adjective clause, underline it. If it does not, write “none” beneath the sentence.

1. I bought a car from Merdine, and it turned out to be a lemon.
2. The car that I bought from Merdine turned out to be a lemon.
3. Pandora, who had recently celebrated a birthday, opened the box of gifts.
4. Lila, who has been the fire warden for 30 years, lives in a trailer with some scrappy dogs and cats.
5. Lila, who lives in a trailer with some scrappy dogs and cats, has been the fire warden for 30 years.
6. People who smoke cigarettes should be considerate of nonsmokers.
7. Jacob, who smokes cigarettes, is considerate of nonsmokers.
8. Mr. Mann has small, dark eyes, which peer inquisitively from behind metal-rimmed glasses.
9. My wedding ring is worth at least ten dollars, and now I have lost it.
10. I have lost my wedding ring, which is worth at least ten dollars.
11. **Punctuating Adjective Clauses**

These three guidelines will help you decide when to set off an adjective clause with commas:

1. **Adjective clauses beginning with *that* are never set off from the main clause with commas.**

Food *that has turned green in the refrigerator* should be thrown away.

1. **Adjective clauses beginning with *who* or *which* should *not* be set off with commas if omitting the clause would change the basic meaning of the sentence. (Restrictive Clause)**

Students *who turn green* should be sent to the infirmary.

Because we don't mean that *all* students should be sent to the infirmary, the adjective clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence. For this reason, we don't set off the adjective clause with commas.

3**. Adjective clauses beginning with *who* or *which* should be set off with commas if omitting the clause would *not* change the basic meaning of the sentence. (Nonrestrictive Clause)**

Last week's pudding, *which has turned green in the refrigerator,* should be thrown away.

Here the *which* clause provides added, but not essential information, and so we set it off from the rest of the sentence with commas.

**Practice 2:**

**Practice in Punctuating Adjective Clauses**  
In the following sentences, add commas to set off adjective clauses that provide additional, but not essential, information.

1. Caramel de Lites which are cookies sold by the Girl Scouts contain 70 calories each.
2. These are the times that try men's souls.
3. I refuse to live in any house that Jack built.
4. I left my son at the campus day-care center which is available to all full-time students with young children.
5. Students who have young children are invited to use the free day-care center.
6. A physician who smokes and overeats has no right to criticize the personal habits of her patients.
7. Gus who gave Merdine a bouquet of ragweed has been exiled to the storm cellar for a week.
8. Professor Legree lost his only umbrella which he has owned for 20 years.
9. Healthy people who refuse to work should not be given government assistance.
10. Felix who was once a hunter in the Yukon stunned the roach with one blow from a newspaper.
11. **Combining Sentences with Adjective Clauses**

So far in our study of [adjective clauses](http://grammar.about.com/od/ab/g/adjclterm.htm), we've learned the following:

1. The adjective clause--a word group that modifies a noun--is a common [form of subordination](http://grammar.about.com/od/basicsentencegrammar/a/adjclause.htm).
2. An adjective clause usually begins with a [relative pronoun](http://grammar.about.com/od/basicsentencegrammar/a/relpradjcl02.htm).
3. The two main types of adjective clauses are [restrictive and nonrestrictive](http://grammar.about.com/od/basicsentencegrammar/a/restrnonradjc03.htm).

Now we're ready to practice building and combining sentences with adjective clauses. 

Consider how these two sentences can be combined:

My mp3 player fell apart after a few weeks.   
My mp3 player cost over $200.

By substituting the relative pronoun *which* for the subject of the second sentence, we can create a single sentence containing an adjective clause: 

*My mp3 player, which cost over $200, fell apart after a few weeks.*

Or we may choose to substitute *which* for the subject of the first sentence: 

*My mp3 player, which fell apart after a few weeks, cost over $200.*

**Put what you think is the main idea in the main clause, the secondary (or *subordinate* ) idea in the adjective clause. And keep in mind that an adjective clause usually appears *after* the noun it modifies.**

**Practice 3: Building Sentences with Adjective Clauses**  
Combine the sentences in each set into a single, clear sentence with at least one adjective clause. Subordinate the information that *you* think is of secondary importance.

1. The first alarm clock woke the sleeper by gently rubbing his feet.  
   The first alarm clock was invented by Leonardo da Vinci.
2. Some children have not received flu shots.  
   These children must visit the school doctor.

1. Success encourages the repetition of old behavior.  
   Success is not nearly as good a teacher as failure.

1. I showed the arrowhead to Rachel.  
   Rachel's mother is an archaeologist.

1. Merdine was born in a boxcar.  
   Merdine was born somewhere in Arkansas.  
   Merdine gets homesick every time she hears the cry of a train whistle.

1. The space shuttle is a rocket.  
   The rocket is manned.  
   This rocket can be flown back to earth.  
   This rocket can be reused.

1. Henry Aaron played baseball.  
   Henry Aaron played with the Braves.  
   Henry Aaron played for 20 years.  
   Henry Aaron was voted into the Hall of Fame.  
   The vote was taken in 1982.

1. Oxygen is colorless.  
   Oxygen is tasteless.  
   Oxygen is odorless.  
   Oxygen is the chief life-supporting element of all plant life.  
   Oxygen is the chief life-supporting element of all animal life.

1. Bushido is the traditional code of honor of the samurai.  
   Bushido is based on the principle of simplicity.  
   Bushido is based on the principle of honesty.  
   Bushido is based on the principle of courage.  
   Bushido is based on the principle of justice.

1. Merdine danced on the roof.  
   It was the roof of her trailer.  
   Merdine danced during the thunderstorm.  
   The thunderstorm flooded the county.  
   The thunderstorm was last night.