

# Using Subordination for Clarity, Style, Elaboration

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## SOME BASIC SKILLS

### Chunking sentences

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- A.** Select the sentence that is divided into *meaningful* chunks.
1. Dudley, who was so large his / bottom drooped over either side of the kitchen / chair, turned to Harry.
  2. Dudley, / who was so large his bottom drooped over either side of the kitchen chair, / turned to Harry.
- B.** Identify the sentence that can be divided into chunks that match the model's chunks.  
*Model:* Enraged, hissing furiously, / the snake slithered straight toward Justin Finch-Fletchley, / its fangs exposed, posed to strike.
1. Near the ladder, the open paint can presented a hazard, with small children on the playground in jeopardy.
  2. Frightened, hiding nervously, the rabbit burrowed backward in the bush, its eyes blinking, ready to bolt.
- C.** Chunk the model into meaningful parts using slash marks; select the sentence that imitates the chunking in the model sentence; chunk it; *write your own imitation.*  
*Model:* Slowly, very slowly, the snake raised its head until its eyes were on a level with Harry's.
1. Tense, very tense, Alfredo approached his boss, someone he always considered a sarcastic, unpleasant curmudgeon.
  2. Quietly, very quietly, Bridgette crossed the room until her hands were on the diary of her sister.
- Model:* Professor Dumbledore was standing by the mantelpiece, beaming, near Professor McGonagall, who was taking great gasps, clutching her chest.
3. The parent was looking down the table, smiling, beside the host, who was showing unvarnished pride, describing the recipe.
  4. Once in a while, when time hung heavy, I would take a walk in the woods not far from my house, listening to nature's music.

(Model sentences from Rowlings's Harry Potter novels as used in Killgallon; others in this handout are snatched or adapted from Killgallon, Benjamin & Berger, Gordon, and Noden. See sources list at the end of this handout.)

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## Using commas

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**L:** Commas to separate  $\geq 3$  items in a **list**

**I:** Commas to set off **introductory** elements before the subject or main/independent clause

**E:** Commas to set off **extra** information (nonessential elements)

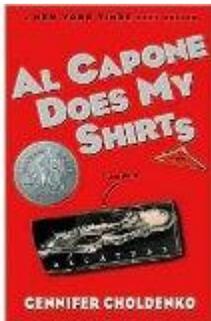
**S:** Commas to set off **side-by-side** sentences when a coordinating conjunction is also used

## Identifying sentence boundaries

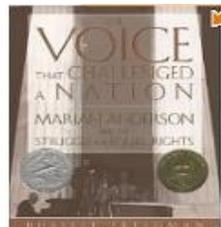
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**USE THIS TEST:  
GUESS WHAT?**

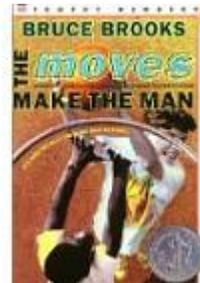
Sort book titles to see which meet the test. Say “Guess what?” and read the title. If the title satisfactorily answers the question, it is an independent clause/main clause/sentence. If the title does not satisfactorily answer the question, then the title is a dependent clause or a phrase. (From Benjamin & Berger)



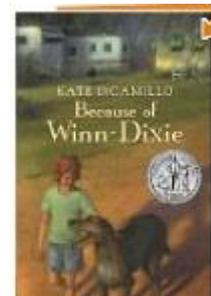
*Al Capone Does My Shirts*



*The Voice That Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights*



*The Moves Make the Man*



*Because of Winn-Dixie*

## USING SUBORDINATION

### Noun clauses

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#### **Facts**

- Dependent clauses: Have a subject and verb; can't stand alone as a sentence
- Can't be removed
- Do nominal jobs: S, DO, IO, OP, SC
- Often begin with one of these words: *what, how, that, why*

**Noun clauses do the job of nominals; they name/identify things.**

#### **Examples:**

1. Prince Caspian knew that he had done a terrible thing. (DO; Lewis, *Chronicles of Narnia*)
2. What Jim Thatcher had said about her man could have been a trick. (S; Borland, *When the Legends Die*)
3. I still understood why I had always hated Lucinda's gift. (DO; Levine, *Ella Enchanted*)
4. Up until I turned twelve years old, the kinds of friends I had were what you'd expect. (SC; Krungold, *Onion John*)

**Underline the noun clauses, and then identify their function:**

5. His parents concluded that something dreadful must have happened and that they would probably never see their son again. (Steig, “Sylvester and the Magic Pebble”)

- Placement: Go wherever they are needed in the sentence
- Commas: Not required because essential
- Problem: Even college students may have trouble identifying the functions of these clauses.

#### **Examples**

- What Mars is like
- How a baby laughs
- Why people enjoy dessert

6. Mr. Monroe sat down in a daze as if he were wondering how he came to be sitting in his own living room in a wet raincoat with a strange bunny on his lap. (Howe & Howe, *Bunnacula*)

#### **Expand the sentences by finishing the noun clause at each ^ mark:**

7. The three children did not understand how ^, or how ^. (Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The End*)
8. I asked him once why ^, why ^. (Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*)
9. There was a terrible moment when Father insisted that ^, that ^, and that ^. (DiCamillo, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*)

#### **Expand each sentence by substituting your own noun clause:**

10. I understand what you are saying.
11. That we were alone with the werewolf was shocking.
12. I believe that you are right.

## Adverb clauses

### **Facts**

- Dependent clauses: Have a subject and verb; can't stand alone as a sentence
- Can be removed
- As adverbials, answer these questions: When? Where? Why? How? To what extent?
- Usually begin with subordinating conjunctions, AAWWUBBIS words: **As, Although, After, While, When, Unless, Because, Before, If, Since**

### **Adverb clauses modify verbs. Examples:**

1. When Lucifer confesses, we'll let the rest of you go. (When?)
2. He scratched her flesh where he imagined it itched. (Where?)
3. I've put a spell on you because you could use a little control. (Why?)

### **Underline the adverb clauses and add commas as necessary:**

4. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go. (Baldwin, "Letter to my Nephew")
5. He struck again and again until the buzzard lay dead, until its head was a red pulp. (Steinbeck, *The Red Pony*)

### **Expand the sentences by finishing the adverb clause at each ^ mark:**

6. He stared at the red, shivering reflection of a fire on the white wall of his tent until ^. (Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*)
7. They came to Mars because ^, because ^, because ^. (Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*)

### **Create your own sentence imitating the model; underline the adverb clause; add commas as needed.**

8. Model: Because her irony is rusty, her audience is bored.

### **Expand each sentence by substituting your own adverb clause:**

9. If this is love, I've made a terrible mistake.
10. The debutante took to the outdoors as if she'd been raised by wolves.

- Placement: Are usually moveable
- Commas: Usually required only if placed *before* the main clause
- Problem: May be confused with prepositional phrases

**Examples**

- When my mother laughed that high-pitched demonic screech
- As I stuck my tongue out and crossed my eyes
- If you insist

**Combine the four sentences into one like the model; underline the adverb clause; add commas as needed.**

11. Model: Dad and some of his Air Force buddies were on a cliff of the canyon, trying to work up the nerve to dive into the lake forty feet below, when Mom and a friend drove up. (Walls, *The Glass Castle*)

- They were by the fountain in the plaza.
- The chaperones and a guard approached them.
- They were trying to get away from the museum right behind them.
- Donald and a few of his friends stood.
- They hope to figure out a way to get away.

**Adjective/relative clauses**

**Facts**

- Dependent clauses: Have a subject and verb; can't stand alone as a sentence
- Can be removed
- As multi-word adjectivals, answer these questions: Which one? What kind?
- Usually begin with relative pronouns: *that, which, who, whom, whomever, whoever, whose*; Note: May begin with AAWWUBBIS words

**Adjective/relative clauses modify nominals. Examples:**

**Essential**

1. The hedonist who was looking at his watch began to scratch his crotch. (Which hedonist?)
2. We've reached the point where we usually roll our eyes upward and beg for patience. (What kind of point?)

**Nonessential**

3. Her lederhosen, which had seen better days as a cow, stir to life when she sits on the grass.
4. The pale blue hand, which once was mine, applauded feebly.

**Underline the adjective clauses; add commas if nonessential.**

5. The girl who is stroking the gargoyle is in love.
6. Mergatroyd who is stroking the gargoyle is in love.
7. Mastodons that wear braces should stick to softer food.
8. Lizabetta who was once a teen beauty queen turned her froggy face towards us and croaked.
9. The painting that leered was dragged into the judge's chambers and scolded.
10. The judge who has no children imagined inviting the leering painting home to see his dirty postcard collection.

- Placement:  
Usually to the right of the nominal modified
- Commas: Enclose with commas if the info provided is nonessential to identifying the nominal. *Note:* The relative pronoun *that* usually comes in front of essential clauses.

### Examples

- What Mars is like
- How a baby laughs
- Why people enjoy dessert

**Expand the sentences by finishing the adjective clause at each ^ mark; add commas as needed.**

11. The Lilliputian who ^ sang to her flea in its cage.

12. The gorilla that ^ is no longer my boyfriend.

**Expand each sentence by substituting your own adjective clause; add commas as needed.**

13. The message to you, which may have been an amorous one, was written in a feline hand.

14. The cat who's checking out the back room says she's here on a divine mission.

**Create your own sentence imitating the model; underline the adjective clause; add commas as needed.**

15. Model: I left with my vampire, who was eager and frothing at the mouth, for an early dinner in the public library.

## Appositives

### Facts

- Noun phrases:  
Don't have subjects and verbs
- Rename or describe a nominal so can be like adjectivals that modify a nominal but can also replace the nominal
- Often begin with *a, an, the* or a possessive pronoun or noun
- Placement:  
Usually come right after the nominal they rename or describe

**Appositives rename or describe nominals. Examples:**

1. Gas jets, the primary source of artificial illumination, did little to pierce Chicago's perpetual coal-smoke dusk. (Larson, *The Devil in the White City*)

2. Most amusing of all was the magazine's mascot, Coco, the black human-mouse in tattered poor man's robes, shawls, skullcap, and sandals. (Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*)

3. When the tyrannosaur roared, it was a terrifying sound, a scream from some other world. (Crichton, *Jurassic Park*)

4. James, my werewolf husband, divorced me last week.

**Select the appositive that fits each sentence.**

a. a tasteless, colorless substance that clings to the stomach lining with the avidity of Krazy Glue

b. a pale youth with a greasy rag hung over this shoulder

c. the young man who worked as Mr. Hosokawa's translator

5. There was no one in the Hot Spot store but Mr. Shiflett and the boy behind the counter, ^ . (O'Connor, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own")

6. Watanabe, ^ , leaned over and spoke the words in Japanese to his employer. (Patchett, *Bel Canto*)

7. I considered my own breakfast cereal, ^ .

- Commas: Use if nonessential
- Problem: May be confused with a subject complement, but come right *after* the nominal *not* after a linking verb

**Examples**

- The most delicious bugs
- A black-toothed old woman who raised chickens
- My scuzzy friend with three heads

**Underline the appositives in these sentences written by students to create vivid images; add commas** (from Noden’s *Image Grammar*).

8. The volcano a ravenous God of fire spewed forth lava and ash across the mountain.
9. The old Navajo woman a weak and withered lady stared blankly.
10. The waterfall a tilted pitcher poured the fresh, pure spray into the creek.
11. The fish a mass of slimy flesh felt the alligator’s teeth sink into his scales.

**Unscramble the sentence parts below, creating a sentence like the model; underline the appositive; add commas.**

12. Model: The proprietor, a little gray man with an unkempt mustache and watery eyes, leaned on the counter, reading a newspaper. (Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath*)  
 With a long mane      Eyeing the      Walked down the  
 and long legs      audience      runway  
 The model      A tall thin blonde

**Combine the four sentences into one like the model; underline the appositive; add commas.**

13. Model: Tom Black, a veteran bronc rider, has ridden nine horses to death in the rodeo arena, and at every performance the spectators expect him to kill another one. (Borland, *When the Legends Die*)
  - This sentence is about a fascinating historical speaker, Professor Southwick.
  - He has visited many museums.
  - He visits them for study of the medieval period.
  - At every visit the curators want him to give another lecture.

**Create your own sentence imitating the model; underline the appositive; add commas.**

14. Model: A golden female moth, a biggish one with a two-inch wingspread, flapped in the fire of the candle, dropped its abdomen into the wet wax, stuck, flamed, and frazzled in a second. (Dillard “Death of a Moth”)

**Expand the sentences by adding appositives where each ^ is; create vivid images; add commas.**

15. The spider ^ crawled into the room.
16. He wore an out-of-style jacket ^.
17. I wish my friend ^ would grow up.
18. He held up the trophy ^ and leered at us menacingly.

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**Use appositives to check content** (from Benjamin & Berger, p. 122).

*Sentences about The Giver*

19. Jonas is an inquisitive boy.
20. Jonas can no longer share ideas with Asher.
21. He loves his sister, but he cannot confide in her.
22. Jonas's father disappoints his son.
23. He needs advice from the Giver.

*Turn the sentences below into appositives and embed them in the sentences above, based on what you know about The Giver.*

- a. He is a wise man.
- b. She is an adorable girl with braids.
- c. He is a respected nursery-school principal.
- d. He is a fun-loving boy.
- e. He is the book's main character.

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## Absolutes

### **Facts**

- Phrase often beginning with a possessive noun or pronoun; sometimes the possessive element is elliptical—has been omitted; includes participle
- Adding some form of the verb *to be* usually turns it into a clause
- Add vivid imagery
- Good way to correct excessive coordination
- Placement: May go in the opening, closing, or subject/verb split position
- Commas: Always use commas to set

**Absolutes may modify a nominal, a verb, or an entire sentence.**

### **Examples:**

1. His hands raw, he reached a flat place at the top. [His hands ^ *were* raw.] (Connell, "The Most Dangerous Game")
2. A wild-eyed horse, its bridle torn and dangling, trotted through the mounds of men, tossing its head, whinnying in panic. [Its bridle ^ *was* torn and dangling.] (Lowery, *The Giver*)
3. Mama was out of bed now, her long black skirt over her nightgown. [Her long black skirt ^ *was* over her nightgown.] (Steinbeck, "Flight")

**Create absolutes that describe the image:**



- their eyes tearing
- their tails drooping
- their bodies quivering
- its hood flaring
- [its] fangs bared
- its body coiled to strike
- venom dripping

**Compare absolute phrases to independent & dependent clauses:**

4. Its hood flared. [IC]
5. Its hood flaring [Abs. phrase]
6. When its hood flared [DC]
7. Their tails drooping [Abs. phrase]

**Underline the absolutes; add commas.**

8. Its voice croaking the frog flopped over dead.

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- it off from the rest of the sentence
- Problems: Confused with dependent or independent clauses
- Examples**
- My lips swollen like balloons
  - The tails wagging like crazed windshield wipers
  - His wig as pitiful as a drowned puppy
9. The raptor struck out with its hind legs and, with a single swift movement, ripped open the belly of the fallen animal, coils of intestine falling out like fat snakes (Crichton, *Jurassic Park*)
- Combine the five sentences into one like the model; underline the absolute; add commas.**
10. Model: The wolf was almost as big as a calf, its coat as shaggy as a Russian hat, its fur black, its eyes a dark urine yellow. (King, *Just after Sunset*)
- The sun was low.
  - It was nearly as low as the garage roof.
  - Its rays were as penetrating as a needle’s injection.
  - Its light was blinding.
  - Its heat was a raging unending inferno.
- Create your own sentence imitating the model; underline the absolute; add commas.**
11. Model: She died in one of the downstairs rooms in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight. (Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily”)
- Expand each model sentence by substituting your own absolute.**
12. Model: The superintendent, his head on his chest, was slowly poking the ground with his stick. (Orwell, “A Hanging”)
13. Model: A teenager in a black tank top, a greenish tattoo flowing across her broad back, hoisted a toddler onto her shoulder. (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*)
- Expand the sentences by adding absolutes where each ^ is.**
14. Slowly he fell to his knees and pitched forward onto the road, ^.  
(Ludlum, *The Moscow Vector*)
15. Laughing and shoving restlessly, damp-palmed with excitement, the spectators came shuffling into the great concrete stadium, some ^, some ^, some ^. (Allen, “The Public Hating”)
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### Sources for Sentences & Activities

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