

9

COMPLEX SENTENCE

NOUN CLAUSES

After studying through this chapter, you are expected to be able to write complex sentences with noun clauses.

A dependent clause may function as an adjective, a noun, or an adverb in the main clause. In the previous chapter, we learned how to construct a complex sentence containing an adjective clause. In the present chapter, we are going to learn how to construct a complex sentence containing a noun clause. A noun clause is a dependent clause which functions as a noun in the main clause. Let us study the following sentences critically.

No	Sentence
1	She said something .
2	She said that you left without permission .
3	Something is against the regulation.
4	That you left without permission is against the regulation.
5	I know something .
6	I know what she told you last night .
7	Something might be important.
8	What she told you last night might be important.

The object of the verb “said” in Sentence 1 is a noun, “something;” whereas the object of the same verb in Sentence 2 is a noun clause, “that you left without permission.” The subject of Sentence 3 is a noun, “something;” whereas the subject of Sentence 4 is a noun clause, “that you left without permission.” Now, what is the object of the verb “know” in Sentence 5? And what is the object of the verb “know” in Sentence 6? Yes, in Sentence 5 the object is a noun, “something;” while in Sentence 6 the object is a noun clause, “what she told you last night.” What is the subject of Sentence 7? Of Sentence 8? Yes, the subject of Sentence 7 is a noun, “something;” while the subject of Sentence 8 is a noun clause, “what she told you last night.”

Activity 9.1

Identify the noun clause, if any, in each of the following sentences; and state whether it functions as the subject of a sentence or as the object of a verb.

1. What did you say to the old man?
2. What Jack did last night is hard to believe.
3. That young woman has been waiting for a long time.
4. That Mary was here last night was obvious.
5. We cannot tell you where we went last night.
6. I know what you have in your pocket.
7. The woman asked me where I was born.
8. The woman also asked me a lot of other questions.
9. She claimed that she knew my parents.

It should be clear now that (1) a noun clause is an independent clause which functions as a noun in the main clause, and (2) a noun clause can fill the slots commonly filled by a noun in a sentence, meaning that, as a noun can function as subject of a sentence and object of a verb, a noun clause can function as subject of a sentence and object of a verb.

There are some other functions in a sentence that a noun can carry out, e.g., object of preposition, complement, and appositive. However, for our present purpose, we are going to limit our coverage to two functions: subject of a sentence and object of a verb. Thus, based on its function in the main clause, we are going to discuss two types of noun clauses: those that function as subject and those that function as object.

Based on its origin, we have several types of noun clauses: those from a statement, those from a yes-no question, and those from a wh-question. There is another type of noun clauses, those from an exclamation. But this type is not going to be covered. Now, let us study the following sentences.

No	Sentence
	subject
statement	
9	That Mary needs a doctor is obvious.
10	That John is a hard-working student can not be denied.
yes-no question	
11	Whether Jack is guilty [or not] will be decided by the jury.
12	Whether Molly will be operated [or not] is not clear to us.
wh-question	
13	What Mary needs is a general check-up.
14	What John wants is a house of his own.

No	Sentence
	object
	statement
15	We understand that Mary needs a doctor.
16	Everyone knows that John is a hard-working student.
	yes-no question
17	The jury will decide whether Jack is guilty [or not].
18	We don't know whether Molly will be operated [or not].
	wh-question
19	The hospital can provide what Mary needs.
20	We will build what John wants.

In Sentences 9–14, the noun clauses all function as subjects of the sentences; in Sentences 9–10 the noun clauses are derived from statements, in Sentences 11–12 the noun clauses are derived from yes-no questions, and in Sentences 13–14 the noun clauses are derived from wh-questions. Similarly, in Sentences 15–20, the noun clauses all function as objects of the verbs; in Sentences 15–16 the noun clauses are derived from statements, in Sentences 17–18 the noun clauses are derived from yes-no questions, and in Sentences 19–20 the noun clauses are derived from wh-questions. Now, let us see how each of the above sentences are constructed.

In each set below, there are four sentences or clauses:

- (a) is an independent clause to be made the main clause of the complex sentence containing a noun clause,
- (b) is another independent clause to be made into a noun clause,
- (c) is the noun clause derived from the independent clause (b), and
- (d) is the complex sentence constructed by replacing the subject or the object in the first independent clause (a) with the noun clause (c).

[9]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	Something is obvious.
b	Mary needs a doctor.
c	[that Mary needs a doctor]
d	That Mary needs a doctor is obvious.

[10]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	Something cannot be denied.
b	John is a hard-working student.
c	[that John is a hard-working student]
d	That John is a hard-working student can not be denied.

[11]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	Something will be decided by the jury.
b	Is Jack guilty?
c	[whether Jack is guilty]
d	Whether Jack is guilty [or not] will be decided by the jury.

[12]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	Something is clear to us.
b	Will Mary be operated?
c	[whether Mary will be operated]
d	Whether Molly will be operated [or not] is not clear to us.

[13]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	The thing is a general check-up.
b	What does Mary need?
c	[what Mary needs]
d	What Mary needs is a general check-up.

[14]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	The thing is a house of his own.
b	What does John want?
c	[what John wants]
d	What John wants is a house of his own.

[15]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	We understand something.
b	Mary needs a doctor.
c	[that Mary needs a doctor]
d	We understand that Mary needs a doctor.

[16]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	Everyone knows something.
b	John is a hard-working student.
c	[that John is a hard-working student]
d	Everyone knows that John is a hard-working student.

[17]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	The jury will decide something.
b	Is Jack guilty?
c	[whether Jack is guilty]
d	The jury will decide whether Jack is guilty [or not].

[18]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	We don't know something.
b	Will Mary be operated?
c	[whether Mary will be operated]
d	We don't know whether Molly will be operated [or not].

[19]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	The hospital can provide something.
b	What does Mary need?
c	[what Mary needs]
d	The hospital can provide what Mary needs.

[20]

No	Sentence/Clause
a	We will build something.
b	What does John want?
c	[what John wants]
d	We will build what John wants.

From all the examples above we learn that a noun clause derived from a statement is formed with the conjunction “that,” a noun clause derived from a yes-no question is formed with the conjunction “whether” or “whether...or not,” and a noun clause derived from a wh-question is formed with the wh-word itself as the conjunction.

Besides, a noun clause derived from a yes-no question might also be formed with the conjunction “if,” especially when the noun clause functions as object of the verb. However, when the noun clause functions as subject of the sentence, we cannot use the conjunction “if.” Sentence 21 through Sentence 24 below are all grammatical because we can use either “whether” or “if” when the noun clause functions as the object of the verb. On the other hand, while Sentence 25 and Sentence 27 are grammatical, Sentence 26 and Sentence 28 are not grammatical because we cannot use “if” when the noun clause functions as the subject of the sentence.

No	Sentence
21	Molly asked whether Mary agreed to come.
22	Molly asked if Mary agreed to come.
23	We must discover whether John saw the accident.
24	We must discover if John saw the accident.
25	Whether Mary agreed to come is not obvious.
26	If Mary agreed to come is not obvious. *
27	Whether John saw the accident is important to find out.
28	If John saw the accident is important to find out. *

In addition, when a noun clause derived from a statement or from a yes-no question functions as subject of the main clause, it is often placed at the end of the sentence, while the slot of subject in the sentence is filled up with an introductory “it.” Study the following sentences critically.

No	Sentence
29	That Mary needs a doctor is obvious.
30	It is obvious that Mary needs a doctor.
31	That John is a hard-working student can not be denied.
32	It can not be denied that John is a hard-working student.
33	Whether Jack is guilty [or not] will be decided by the jury.
34	It will be decided by the jury whether Jack is guilty [or not].
35	Whether Molly will be operated [or not] is not clear to us.
36	It is not clear to us whether Molly will be operated [or not].

Sentence 29 and Sentence 30 are the same, the only difference is that in Sentence 30 the subject noun clause is placed at the end of the sentence, and in subject place the introductory “it” is used. The same explanation applies to Sentence 31 and Sentence 32, to Sentence 33 and Sentence 34, as well as to Sentence 35 and Sentence 36.

Noun Clauses From Statement

Activity 9.2

Below are 9 sets of sentences. Change Sentence C in each set into a noun clause, and then insert the noun clause into Sentence A and Sentence B to make three complex sentences. The first one is done for you.

1. a. **Something** is true.
b. John told me **something**.
c. Jack built a new house.
→ [that Jack built a new house]
⇒ That Jack built a new house is true.
⇒ It is true that Jack built a new house.
⇒ John told me that Jack built a new house.

2. a. **Something** is unimaginable.

b. I know **something**.

c. Mary works in a bank.

→ _____

⇒ _____

⇒ _____

⇒ _____

3. a. **Something** is clear.

b. Mary learned **something**.

c. Jack likes his coffee black.

→ _____

⇒ _____

⇒ _____

⇒ _____

4. a. **Something** is unbelievable.

b. My mother cannot believe **something**.

c. My sister avoids meeting John.

→ _____

⇒ _____

⇒ _____

⇒ _____

5. a. **Something** is surprising.

b. I did not expect **something**.

c. Molly would show me her stamp collection.

→ _____

⇒ _____

⇒ _____

⇒ _____

6. a. **Something** is very strange.

b. Molly discovered **something**.

c. Mary came to campus late this morning.

→ _____

⇒ _____

⇒ _____

⇒ _____

7. a. **Something** is not disputable.
 b. No one can dispute **something**.
 c. Physical exercise is good for our health.

→ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

8. a. **Something** is wonderful.
 b. I have never expected **something**.
 c. My niece is coming for a visit.

→ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

9. a. **Something** is disappointing.
 b. We regretted **something**.
 c. The teacher postponed the examination.

→ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

Activity 9.3

Complete the following sentences so that each becomes a complex sentence containing a noun clause, derived from a statement.

1. It is true that ...
 ⇒ _____
 2. It surprises me that ...
 ⇒ _____
 3. It is unforgettable that ...
 ⇒ _____
 4. It can not be debated that ...
 ⇒ _____
 5. It is unbelievable that ...
 ⇒ _____

6. John believes that ...

⇒ _____

7. Molly claimed that ...

⇒ _____

8. My sister admitted that ...

⇒ _____

9. My brother told me that ...

⇒ _____

Activity 9.4

Construct 9 complex sentences of your own each containing a noun clause derived from a statement, either as subject of the sentence or as object of the verb.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

7 _____

8 _____

9 _____

Noun Clauses

From Yes-No Question

Activity 9.5

Below are 9 sets of sentences. Change Sentence C in each set into a noun clause, and then insert the noun clause into Sentence A and Sentence B to make three complex sentences. The first one is done for you.

1. a. **Something** is not clear yet.
 b. John asked me **something**.
 c. Will Mary come tonight?
 → [whether Mary will come tonight]
 ⇒ Whether Mary will come tonight is not clear yet.
 ⇒ It is not clear yet whether Mary will come tonight.
 ⇒ John asked me whether (if) Mary would come tonight.

2. a. **Something** is not known.
 b. I don't know **something**.
 c. Can Jack speak Chinese?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

3. a. **Something** is irrelevant.
 b. We can not determine **something**.
 c. Does Molly live near campus?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

4. a. **Something** does not matter.
 b. We do not need to find out **something**.
 c. Are Jack and John brothers?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
5. a. **Something** does not make a difference.
 b. They don't question **something**.
 c. Did the train arrive on schedule?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
6. a. **Something** was important to discover.
 b. The lawyers had to discover **something**.
 c. Has the woman sold the house to anyone?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
7. a. **Something** has not been decided.
 b. The teachers have not decided **something**.
 c. Will the students take their bags with them?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

8. a. **Something** is doubted.
 b. The teacher wants to know **something**.
 c. Did the students leave the classroom clean?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
9. a. **Something** can not be ascertained.
 b. The police need to determine **something**.
 c. Did the man watch the boys playing football?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

Activity 9.6

Complete the following sentences so that each becomes a complex sentence containing a noun clause derived from a yes-no question.

1. It seems unimportant now whether ...
 ⇒ _____
2. It was not clear whether ...
 ⇒ _____
3. It can not be determined whether ...
 ⇒ _____
4. It should be found out whether ...
 ⇒ _____
5. The man won't tell me whether ...
 ⇒ _____
6. The woman asked me whether ...
 ⇒ _____
7. The committee has to discover whether ...
 ⇒ _____
8. The teacher would like to know whether ...
 ⇒ _____
9. We can not determine whether ...
 ⇒ _____

Activity 9.7

Construct 9 complex sentences of your own each containing a noun clause derived from a yes-no question, either as subject of the sentence or as object of the verb.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

7 _____

8 _____

9 _____

Noun Clauses From Wh-Question

Activity 9.8

Below are 9 sets of sentences. Change Sentence C in each set into a noun clause, and then insert the noun clause into Sentence A and Sentence B to make two complex sentences. The first one is done for you.

1. a. **The thing** is studying their lessons.
 b. A teacher knows **something**.
 c. What should students do?
 → [what students should do]
 ⇒ What students should do is studying their lessons.
 ⇒ A teacher knows what students should do.

2. a. **Something** is a secret.
 b. Not many people know **something**.
 c. Where will Mary keep her books?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

3. a. **Something** does not concern us.
 b. We do not need to know **something**.
 c. Whom did Mary invite to the party?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

4. a. **Something** is not relevant.
 b. You don't have to tell us **something**.
 c. What did Jack say to Mary last night?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

5. a. **Something** cannot be determined.
 b. We cannot determine **something**.
 c. When did Mary write those letters?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

6. a. **Something** is necessary to discover.
 b. We need to discover **something**.
 c. Whose coat was John wearing to the party?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

7. a. **Something** is important to find out.
 b. We have to find out **something**.
 c. How many books can you carry inside the bag?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
8. a. **The thing** is a white mouse .
 b. I cannot guess **the thing**.
 c. What did the boy keep in his pocket?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____
9. a. **The place** is her grandmother's house.
 b. I could tell you **the place**.
 c. Where does the girl go every Sunday afternoon?
 → _____
 ⇒ _____
 ⇒ _____

Activity 9.9

Complete the following sentences so that each becomes a complex sentence containing a noun clause derived from a wh-question.

1. What ... interests me.
 ⇒ _____
2. Who ... is still a mystery.
 ⇒ _____
3. Where ... does not concern us.
 ⇒ _____
4. When ... is important to find out.
 ⇒ _____
5. Jack believes what ...
 ⇒ _____
6. My sister does not know who ...
 ⇒ _____

7. Molly does not like how ...

⇒ _____

8. We would not tell you when ...

⇒ _____

9. John will not find out where ...

⇒ _____

Activity 9.10

*Construct 9 complex sentences of your own each containing a noun clause derived from a *wh*-question, either as subject of the sentence or as object of the verb.*

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

7 _____

8 _____

9 _____