Composition- 2nd year- 2nd semester

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6th lecture

Book: Understanding and Using English Grammar- third edition

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Chapter 12: Noun Clauses

A noun clause is a clause that plays the role of a noun. For example (noun clauses shaded):

- I like what I see.

  (Like all clauses, a noun clause has a subject and a verb. In this example, the subject of the clause is "I" and the verb is "see.")

- I know that patience has its limits.

  (In this example, the subject of the clause is "patience" and the verb is "has.")
Compare the two examples above to these:

- I like **innovation**.
- I know **people**.

The words in bold are all nouns. This proves that the shaded clauses in the first two examples are functioning as nouns.

Definition of "Clause"

A clause has a subject and a verb and functions as one part of speech.

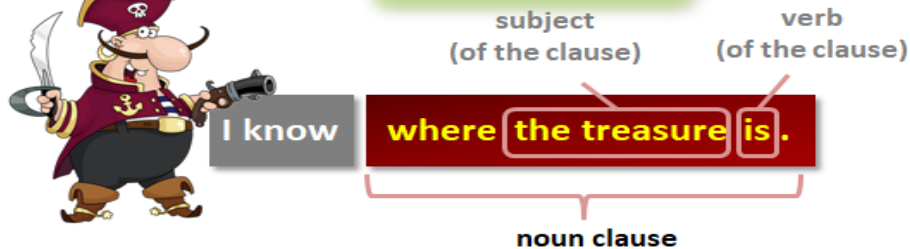## Noun Clause

Definition a clause (with a subject and verb) that functions as a noun

Example 1

subject (of the clause)
verb (of the clause)

Whatever you wish is my command.

noun clause

Example 2

subject (of the clause)
verb (of the clause)

I know **where the treasure is**.

noun clause

Noun clauses beginning with a question word

Lots of noun clauses start with "that," "how," or a "**wh**"-word (i.e., "what," "who," "which," "when," "where," or "why"). For example:

- I know **that** it happened.
- I know **how** it happened.
- I know **why** it happened.

Here are some easy examples of noun clauses. In each example, the noun clause is shaded, the subject of the clause is bold, and the verb of the noun clause is underlined.

- I know that **the story** is true.
- I saw how **the accident** happened.
- I understand why **it** was necessary.

- I know **who** <u>said</u> that.

  (Often, the opening word (i.e., "how," "that," or the "wh"-word) is the subject of the noun clause.)

The function of noun clauses

Like any noun, a noun clause can be a subject, an object, or a complement. Here are some more easy examples of noun clauses as subjects, objects, and complements.

- Whoever smelt it liked it.

  (Here, the noun clause is a subject.)

- My command is whatever you wish.

  (Here, the noun clause is a subject complement.)

- I will give what you said some thought.

  (Here, the noun clause is an indirect object.)

Noun clauses beginning with 'whether' or 'if'

We can use 'if' or 'whether' to report indirect yes-no questions. In this case, it becomes a noun clause. 'If' is more common than 'whether'. Examples:

Call the bakeries around town and find out **if** any of them sell raspberry pies.

I rang Peter from the station and asked **if** I could drop in to see him before going back or **if** he'd meet me.

We often prefer 'whether; in more formal contexts. Examples:

The teachers will be asked **whether** they would recommend the book to their classes.

John read a letter that he'd written and the board discussed **whether** it should be mailed.

We prefer whether with or when there is more than one alternative in the indirect question:

After the election, we asked **whether** the parties should change their leaders, their policies, **or** both.

To express an alternative, we can use 'or not' with 'if' and 'whether'. With 'whether' we can use 'or not' immediately after whether or in end position. With 'if' we use 'or not' in end position only. Examples:

I called Bill to find out **whether or not** he really did go to Afghanistan.

I called Bill to find out **whether** he really did go to Afghanistan **or not**.

I called Bill to find out **if** he really did go to Afghanistan **or not**.

We use 'whether' and not 'if' before a to-infinitive, often when we're referring to future plans or decisions:

I was wondering **whether** to go for a swim.

Some financial decisions, such as planning a pension, need to be taken as early as possible. Others, such as **whether** to move house, can probably only be made much later.

We use 'whether' and not 'if' after prepositions. Examples:

Later I argued with the doctor about **whether** I had hit my head, since I couldn't remember feeling it.

Not: ~~Later I argued with the doctor about if I had hit my head~~ …

The police seemed mainly interested in **whether** there were any locks on the windows.

Not: ~~The police seemed mainly interested in if there were any locks~~ …

Question words followed by infinitives

A question word + **infinitive** can serve as the object of a verb. Study the following sentences.

- I don't know what to do. (Here the structure 'what to do' is the object of the verb know.)
- We must find out what to do next.
- I don't know where to turn for help.
- Let us decide when to start.
- We will have to find out how to reach the place.
- We must remember where to turn off the main road.
- Do you know what to look for?
- I will show you how to manage it.
- Could you tell me where to find a good hotel?
- Somebody should teach you how to behave.

Note that a **question word** + **infinitive** cannot stand alone. We cannot say 'what to do'. Instead we must say: *'What shall we do?'* or *'What is to be done?'*

The question word + infinitive structure can be changed into a noun clause.

- *'I don't know what to do'* means *'I don't know what I should do'*.
- *'I don't know where to turn for help'* means *'I don't know where I should turn for help'*.

Noun clauses beginning with 'that'

A **that-clause** is an example of a noun clause. It can be the subject or the object of the verb.

I believe **that he is innocent.**

Here the that-clause 'that he is innocent' is the object of the verb **believe.**

She said **that she can speak three languages. (**Object – that she can speak three languages)

I suspect **that she eloped with her boyfriend.**

The **that-clause** can also act as the subject of the verb.

Study the examples given below:

That she should forget me so quickly was rather a shock.

Here the that-clause 'that she should forget me so quickly' acts as the subject of the verb **was.**

That she delivered a marvelous performance pleased her parents. (Subject – that she delivered a marvelous performance)

Instead of 'that' we can also use the expressions 'the fact that', 'the belief that', 'the idea that' and 'the evidence that'.

The fact that she didn't recognize me was rather a shock.

The fact that she didn't understand English made it difficult for her to get a job.

The idea that the teacher should know everything is unacceptable.

Exercise 5, p.243:

□ EXERCISE 5. Noun clauses beginning with a question word.
(Chart 12-2 and Appendix Unit B)

Directions: Use the words in parentheses to complete the sentences. Use any appropriate verb tense. Some of the completions contain noun clauses, and some contain questions.

1. A: Where *(Ruth, go)* _____*did Ruth go*_____? She's not in her room.

    B: I don't know. Ask her friend Tina. She might know where *(Ruth, go)*
    _____*Ruth went*_____.

2. A: Oops! I made a mistake. Where *(my eraser, be)* _____?
    Didn't I lend it to you?

    B: I don't have it. Ask Sally where *(it, be)* _____. I think I saw
    her using it.

————————

*IBM = the name of a corporation (International Business Machines)

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3. A: The door isn't locked! Why *(Fred, lock, not)* _____ it
    before he left?*

    B: Why ask me? How am I supposed to know why *(he, lock, not)* _____
    _____ it? Maybe he just forgot.

4. A: Mr. Lee is a recent immigrant, isn't he? How long *(he, be)* _____
    in this country?

    B: I have no idea, but I'll be seeing Mr. Lee this afternoon. Would you like me to ask
    him how long *(he, live)* _____ here?

5. A: Are you a student here? I'm a student here, too. Tell me what classes *(you, take)*
    _____ this term. Maybe we're in some of the same classes.

    B: Math 4, English 2, History 6, and Chemistry 101. What classes *(you, take)*
    _____?

6. A: Help! Quick! Look at that road sign! Which road *(we, be supposed)* _____
    _____ to take?

    B: You're the driver! Don't look at me! I don't know which road *(we, be supposed)*
    _____ to take. I've never been here before in my entire life.

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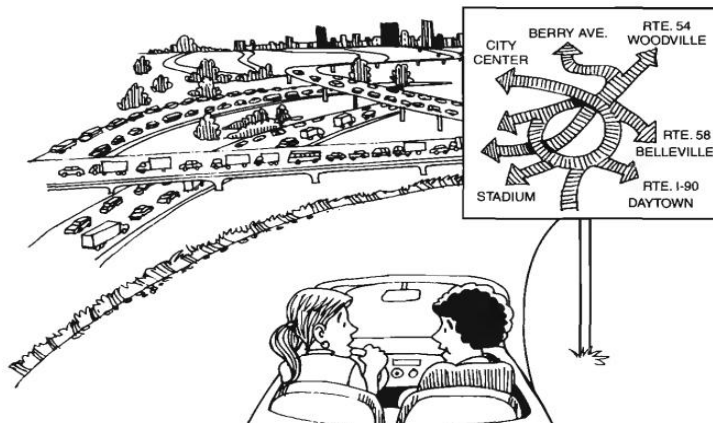
Check your answers:

2. is my eraser.... it is

3. didn't Fred lock.... he didn't lock

4. has he been... he has lived / has been living

5. you are taking... are you taking

6. are we supposed ... we are supposed