



## **SENTENCE DIAGRAMMING 101**

**Instructor: Denise Loock**

### **LESSON #5**

#### **Clause Connectors**

## Noun, Adjective, and Adverb Clauses

Up to this point, we've been working with sentences in which all the diagramming extends from the main (red) line, on which the subject(s), verb(s), and complement (s) of the sentence are placed. In this lesson, we add dependent clauses. They make diagramming, and the life of an editor, much more complex (pun intended).

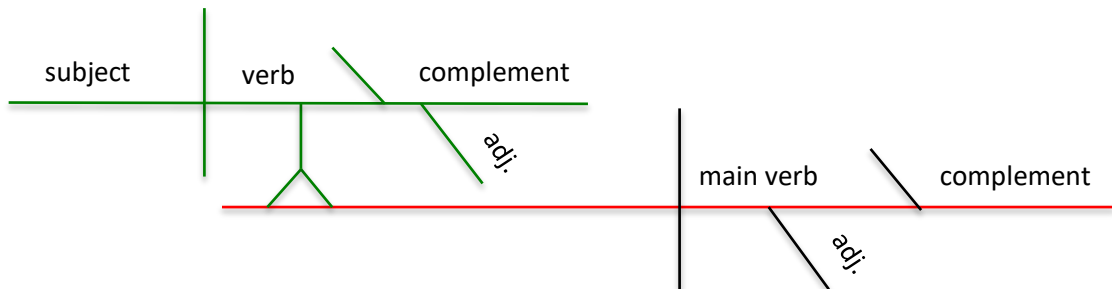
A clause is a group of words containing a subject and a predicate. A clause that can stand alone as a complete thought is called an independent clause. A clause that doesn't express a complete thought is called a dependent (or subordinate) clause. Dependent clauses can function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs.

Sentence with a noun clause: What happened to the crew of the SS *Minnow* will probably never be known.

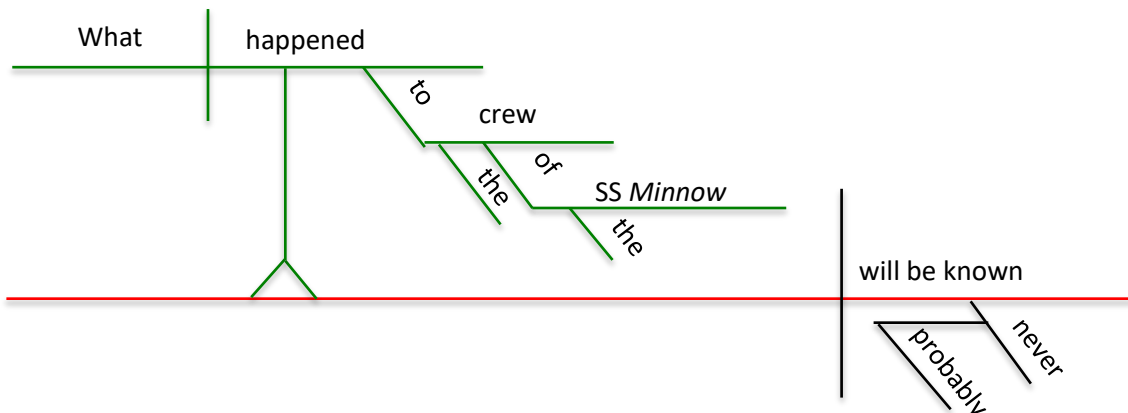
Sentence with an adjective clause: The SS *Minnow*, which was lost at sea, has never been found.

Sentence with an adverb clause: After the SS *Minnow* left port, no one ever saw it or its crew again.

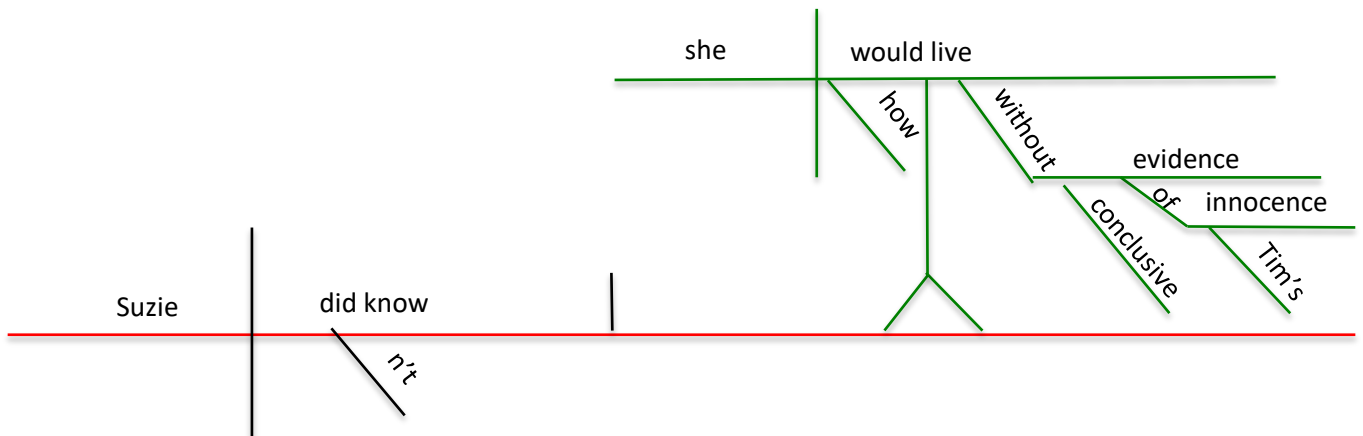
**Diagramming the noun clause.** Noun clauses begin with relative pronouns: that, what, whatever, who, whomever, which, whoever, and whichever. When the noun clause functions as either a subject or a complement in a sentence, it's connected to the main line with a stilt, which highlights its subordinate connection to the sentence:



*What happened to the crew of the SS Minnow will probably never be known.*

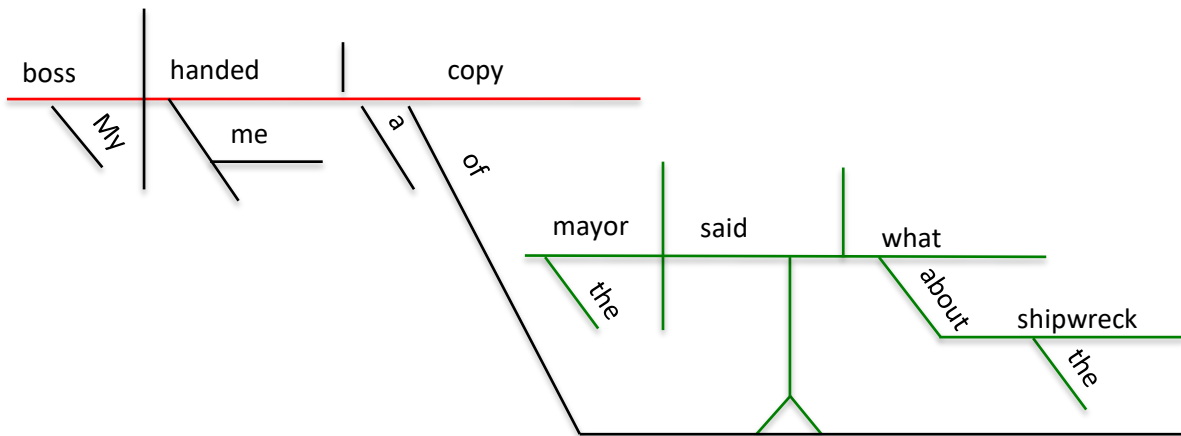


In this sentence, the noun clause functions as a direct object: Suzie didn't know how she would live without conclusive evidence of Tim's innocence.



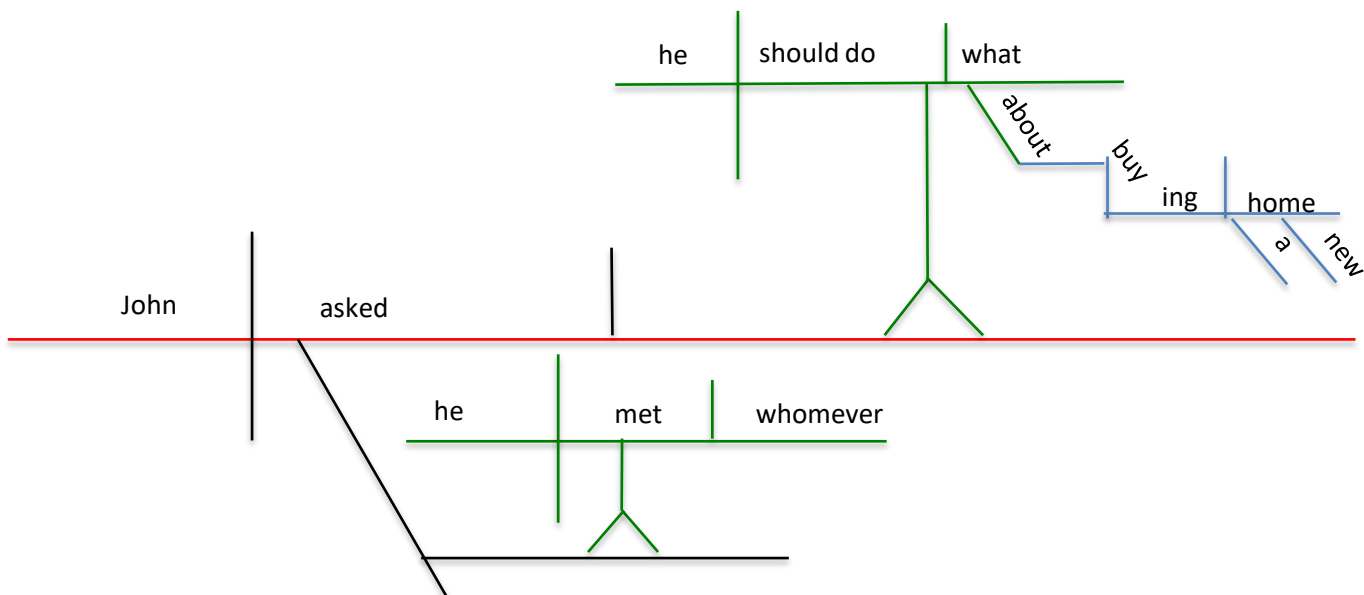
Sometimes the noun clause functions as the object of a preposition or as an indirect object. Can you think of other functions a noun clause might have in a sentence?

My boss handed me a copy of what the mayor said about the shipwreck.

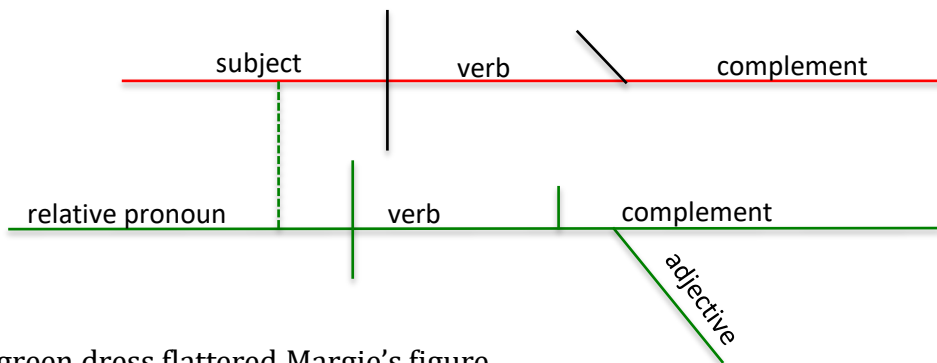


When sentences have more than one clause, and perhaps a verbal phrase, the diagrams can become quite complicated. Consider the sentence diagrammed on the next page. If one of your clients used this sentence in a manuscript, would you suggest a revision? Why?

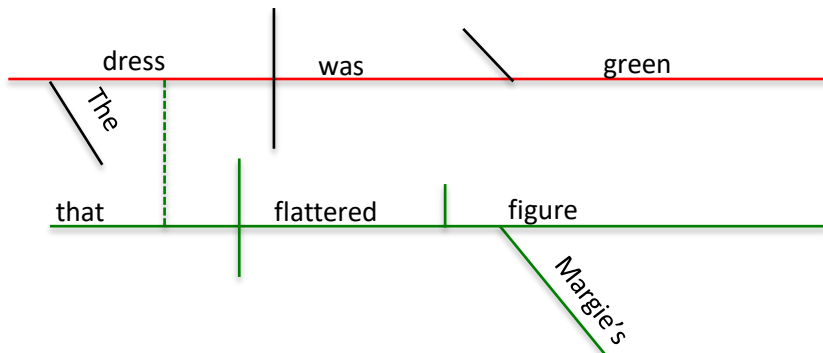
John asked whomever he met what he should do about buying a new home.



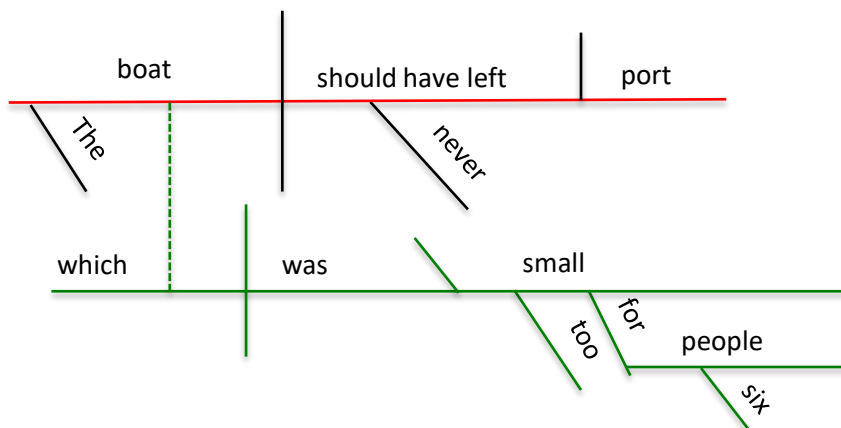
**Diagramming the adjective clause.** Adjective clauses usually begin with relative pronouns too. Like a one-word adjective, an adjective clause is placed under the word it modifies. It's connected to that word with a dotted line.



The green dress flattered Margie's figure.  
 The dress *that flattered Margie's figure* was green.



The boat, which was too small for six people, should have never left port.



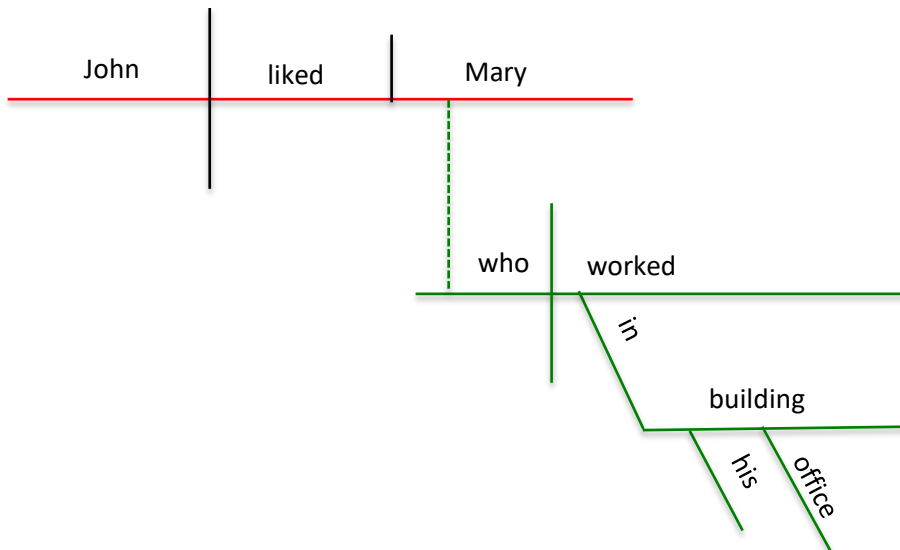
Question: Why are commas necessary for some adjective clauses but not for others?

Answer: If the adjective clause completes the meaning of the sentence, you don't need commas. It is a *restrictive clause*. If the adjective clause can be removed from the sentence without changing the meaning of the independent clause, you use commas. It is a *non-restrictive clause*.

The man *who fell off the bridge* has recovered. The adjective clause is restrictive because the clarification completes the meaning of the sentence.

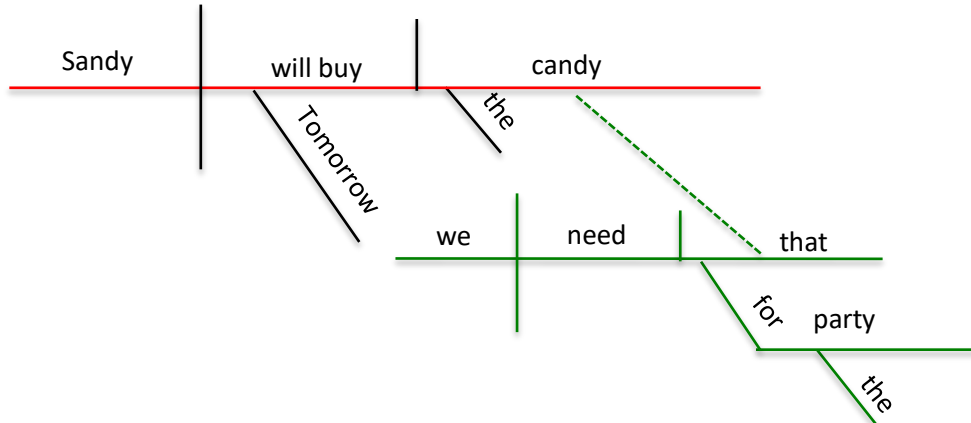
My aunt Mary, *who lives in Boston*, is visiting my parents. The adjective clause is non-restrictive because the subject and predicate still express a complete thought if the adjective clause is removed: My aunt Mary is visiting my parents.

John liked Mary, who worked in his office building.



Many adjective clauses begin with *that*. Sometimes, the *that* functions as the subject, as in the sentence on the previous page: The dress *that* flattered Margie was green. Other times it functions as the direct object of the adjective clause.

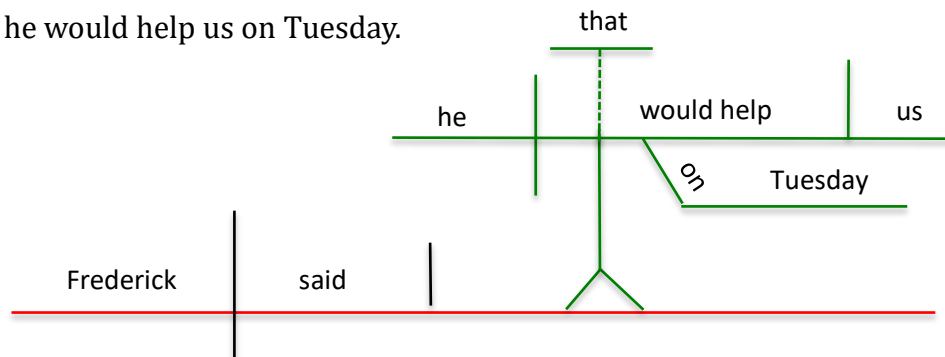
Tomorrow, Sandy will buy the candy that we need for the party.



In this instance, *that* is replacing *candy* in the clause.

Many noun clauses also begin with *that*. Sometimes those noun clauses function as direct objects. In noun clauses, the *that* often functions as an expletive rather than as a part of speech. An expletive is a word that has a function in a sentence but no meaning.

Frederick said that he would help us on Tuesday.

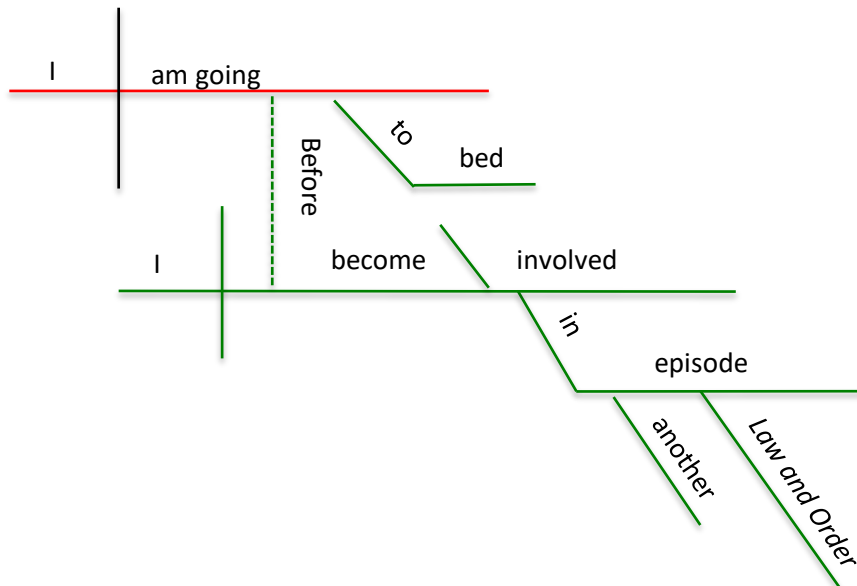


Can you explain why *for the party* goes under *that* in the first sentence on this page, but *on Tuesday* goes under *would help* in the second sentence?

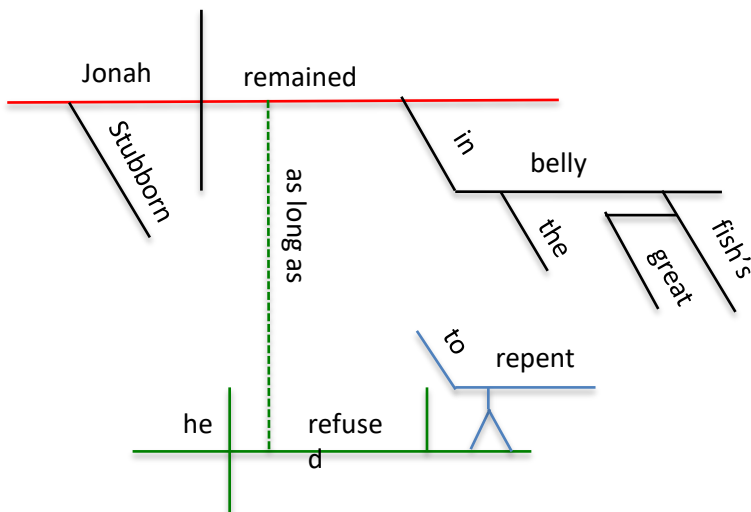
**Diagramming Adverb Clauses.** Adverb clauses can begin with any number of subordinating conjunctions—words such as *after*, *although*, *when*, *because*, and *while*. See a fairly complete list at [English Plus Subordinating Conjunctions](#).

Like one-word adverbs, adverb clauses are placed beneath the verb they modify. Subordinating conjunctions are placed on the dotted line that connects the subordinate clause to the independent clause. Connect adverb clauses to the main line verb to verb.

*Before I become involved in another Law and Order episode, I am going to bed.*



Stubborn Jonah remained in the great fish's belly as long as he refused to repent.



Remember: Sometimes an adjective is placed under another adjective when it cannot stand alone. In this sentence, *great* cannot modify *belly* apart from *fish's*.

Every writer should use a variety of sentence structures, and editors should encourage clients to do so. Be watchful, though, about the number of clauses a client uses in any given sentence. Many times a clause can be reduced to a phrase or a single word:

The flowers that Susie brought were lovely.  
Susie brought lovely flowers.

Whoever wins the election will have many problems to solve.  
The winner of the election will have many problems to solve.

Other times, the author’s meaning may be clarified by separating a sentence with multiple clauses into two sentences:

When you drive a car, you must carry insurance, which pays for any damage or injury you may inflict on others, and, of course, insurance is expensive because so many drivers cause accidents.

Drivers must purchase car insurance to cover the cost of any damage or injury they inflict on others. Of course, insurance is expensive because so many drivers cause accidents.

As you edit, look for clauses. If they clarify a sentence’s meaning, keep them. If they clutter the sentence with unnecessary words, offer your client a more concise alternative.

### Lesson Review

- Dependent (or subordinate) clauses contain a subject and verb, but they can’t stand alone as an independent, complete thought. Dependent clauses can contain modifiers, including verbals and verbal phrases. A sentence that contains one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses is called a complex sentence.
- Noun clauses begin with relative pronouns: *that, what, whatever, who, whomever, which, whoever, and whichever*. When the noun clause functions as either a subject or a complement in a sentence, it’s connected to the main line with a stilt, which emphasizes its importance to the sentence. When the noun clause functions as the object of a preposition, you still use a stilt on the object of the preposition line.
- Adjective clauses usually begin with relative pronouns too. Like a one-word adjective, an adjective clause is placed under the word it modifies. It’s connected to that word with a dotted line.
- Adverb clauses can begin with any number of subordinating conjunctions—words such as *after, although, when, because, and while*. Like one-word adverbs, adverb clauses are placed beneath the verb they modify. Subordinating conjunctions are placed on the dotted line that connects the subordinate clause to the independent clause, verb to verb.



## **Lesson #5 Assignments**

*To receive a Certificate of Completion you must successfully complete all assignments.*

### **Assignment #1**

Diagram these sentences.

- A. The SS *Hopeful*, which capsized at sea, has never been found.
- B. After the SS *Hopeful* left port, no one ever saw it or its crew again.
- C. I don't accept work from a client whose manuscript is filled with profanity.
- D. Susanna ate with us because Tom had a doctor's appointment.
- E. Isn't that the man whom we saw at Red Lobster yesterday?
- F. Joanie said that Brad was coming with us to the movie.
- G. What Benjamin meant is a mystery to me.

### **Assignment #2**

Find three sentences in a manuscript you're editing—one with a noun clause, one with an adjective clause, and one with an adverb clause. Diagram them.

### **Assignment #3**

Find several sentences in a manuscript you're editing that contain multiple clauses. How would you advise a client to revise the sentences to eliminate one or more of the clauses?

Remember: The diagrams of the sentences in each lesson's assignments are provided in the Answer Key. Resist the urge to look at the answers before you attempt to diagram the sentences.