

Subordinator Functions in Adjective Clauses

Fact #4: A subordinator may function within an adjective clause as. . .

- a subject,
- a complement,
- an object of a verb,
- an object of a preposition,
- an object of an infinitive,
- an adjective,
- or as an adverbial.

Subordinator Functions in Adjective Clauses

A subordinator as a **subject**:

- He wrote the music *that is playing right now*.

The adjective clause here, “that is playing right now,” modifies the common noun “music.” Its subject-verb combination is “that is playing” and its subordinator is “that.” In this case, the subordinator “that” functions within the clause as a subject.

Subordinator Functions in Adjective Clauses

A subordinator as a **complement**:

- He is not the player *that he was*.

The adjective clause here, “that he was,” modifies the common noun “player.” Its subject-verb combination is “he was” and its subordinator is “that.” In this case, the subordinator “that” functions within the clause as a complement of the subject “he.”

Subordinator Functions in Adjective Clauses

A subordinator as an **object of a verb**:

- He wrote the music *that they played*.

The adjective clause here, “that they played,” modifies the common noun “music.” Its subject-verb combination is “they played” and its subordinator is “that.” In this case, the subordinator “that” functions within the clause as an object of the verb “played.”

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A subordinator as an **object of a preposition**:

- He wrote the music *which they talked about*.

The adjective clause here, “which they talked about,” modifies the noun “music.” Its subject-verb combination is “they talked” and its subordinator is “which.” In this case, “which” functions within the clause as an object of the preposition “about.”

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A subordinator as an **object of an infinitive**:

- He plays music *that people want to hear*.

The adjective clause here, “that people want to hear,” modifies the common noun “music.” Its subject-verb combination is “people want” and its subordinator is “that.” In this case, the subordinator “that” functions within the clause as an object of the infinitive “to hear.”

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A subordinator as an **adjective**:

- These are the writers *whose music he likes*.

The adjective clause here, “whose music he likes,” modifies the common noun “writers.” Its subject-verb combination is “he likes” and its subordinator is “whose.” In this case, “whose” modifies the common noun “music,” so it functions here as an adjective.

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A subordinator as an **adverbial**:

- The studio *where they record* is in New York.

The adjective clause here, “where they record,” modifies the common noun “studio.” Its subject-verb combination is “they record” and its subordinator is “where.” In this case, the subordinator “where” adds a location reference to the clause, so it functions within the clause as an adverbial.

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To Remember

A subordinator in an adjective clause relates the clause to whatever it modifies and usually has a specific function within the clause. A subordinator in an adjective clause may function within the clause as a subject, complement, object of a verb, object of a preposition, object of an infinitive, as an adjective, or even as an adverbial.