

# Subordinators in Adjective Clauses: “whose”

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## Overview

As a pronoun, “**whose**” is closely related to “**who**” and “**whom**.” In fact, “**who**” is the subject form, “**whom**” is the object form, and “**whose**” is the possessive form. As a subordinator in an adjective clause, within the clause “**whose**” functions exclusively as an adjective. In other words, “**whose**” modifies nouns and pronouns. Consider closely the examples that follow.

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## Overview

As a subordinator in an adjective clause, within the clause “**whose**” functions as an adjective:

- Are those the people *whose daughter goes to Harvard?*

Within this adjective clause, “**whose**” modifies the common noun “daughter,” so within the clause “**whose**” functions as an adjective.

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## Overview

As a subordinator in an adjective clause, in the clause “**whose**” always functions as an adjective:

- There are many students *whose dream is to become a doctor.*

Within this adjective clause, “**whose**” modifies the common noun “dream,” so “**whose**” functions within the clause as an adjective.

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## Overview

As a subordinator in an adjective clause, within the clause “**whose**” functions as an adjective:

- That’s my friend *whose telephone number I can never remember.*

In this adjective clause “**whose**” modifies the noun “number,” so in the clause “**whose**” functions as an adjective. Consider closely the examples that follow.

# Is this an adjective clause?

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**Note:** As a subordinator, “**whose**” appears in adjective clauses and in noun clauses. Each of the following sentences contains a dependent clause with “**whose**” as its subordinator. Is that dependent clause an adjective clause, or is it a noun clause? The difference is in the function of the clause within the sentence. Examine each sentence closely.

# Is this an adjective clause?

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- She is the student *whose essay won the prize*.

The dependent clause in this sentence, “whose essay won the prize,” modifies the common noun “student,” so this is an adjective clause. Its subject-verb combination is “essay won” and its subordinator is “whose.” Within the adjective clause, “whose” modifies the noun “essay,” so “whose” functions as an adjective within the clause.

# Is this an adjective clause?

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- They just announced *whose essay won the prize*.

The dependent clause here, “whose essay won the prize,” functions as an object of the verb “announced,” so this is not an adjective clause; it is a noun clause. The subject-verb combination of the noun clause is “essay won” and the subordinator is “whose.” In the noun clause “whose” modifies the noun “essay,” so within the noun clause “whose” functions as an adjective.

# Is this an adjective clause?

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- We know the people *whose house it was*.

The dependent clause here, “whose house it was,” modifies the common noun “people,” so this is an adjective clause. Its subject-verb combination is “it was” and its subordinator is “whose.” Within the adjective clause, “whose” modifies the common noun “house,” so “whose” functions in the clause as an adjective.

# Is this an adjective clause?

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- They need to determine *whose house it was*.

The dependent clause here, “whose house it was,” functions as an object of the infinitive “to determine,” so this is not an adjective clause; it’s a noun clause. Its subject-verb combination is “it was” and its subordinator is “whose.” Within the noun clause “whose” modifies “house,” so “whose” functions in the clause as an adjective.

Subordinators