

# THE ADJECTIVE CLAUSE

## Recognize an adjective clause when you find one.

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An adjective clause—also called an *adjectival* or *relative* clause—will meet these three requirements:

- First, it will contain a **subject** and a **verb**.
- Next, it will begin with a **relative pronoun** (*who, whom, whose, that, or which*) or a **relative adverb** (*when, where, or why*).
- Finally, it will function as an **adjective**, answering the questions *What kind? How many? or Which one?*

An adjective clause will follow one of these two patterns:

**RELATIVE PRONOUN OR ADVERB** + **SUBJECT** + **VERB**

**RELATIVE PRONOUN AS THE SUBJECT** + **VERB**

Here are examples:

Whose big, brown eyes pleaded for another cookie

**Whose** = relative pronoun; **eyes** = subject; **pleaded** = verb.

Why Fred cannot stand sitting across from his sister Melanie

**Why** = relative adverb; **Fred** = subject; **can stand** = verb (*not*, an adverb, is not officially part of the verb).

That bounced across the kitchen floor

**That** = relative pronoun (functioning as the subject); **bounced** = verb.

Who hiccupped for seven hours afterward

**Who** = relative pronoun (functioning as the subject); **hiccupped** = verb.

## Avoid writing a sentence fragment.

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An adjective clause does not express a complete thought, so it cannot stand alone as a **sentence**. To avoid writing a **fragment**, you must connect each adjective clause to a **main clause**.

Read the examples below. Notice that the adjective clause *follows* the word that it describes.

Diane felt manipulated by her beagle Santana, **whose big, brown eyes pleaded for another cookie**.

Chewing with her mouth open is one reason **why Fred cannot stand sitting across from his sister Melanie**.

Snarling and skidding on the smooth tile, Oreo and Skeeter, Madison's two dogs, competed for the hardboiled egg **that bounced across the kitchen floor**.

Laughter erupted from Annamarie, **who hiccupped for seven hours afterward**.

## Punctuate an adjective clause correctly.

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Punctuating adjective clauses can be tricky. For each sentence, you will have to decide if the adjective clause is **essential** or **nonessential** and then use **commas** accordingly.

**Essential clauses** do *not* require commas. An adjective clause is essential when you need the information it provides.

Look at this example:

The vegetables **that people leave uneaten** are often the most nutritious.

**Vegetables** is nonspecific. To know which ones we are talking about, we must have the information in the adjective clause. Thus, the adjective clause is essential and requires no commas.

If, however, we eliminate *vegetables* and choose a more specific **noun** instead, the adjective clause becomes **nonessential** and *does* require commas to separate it from the rest of the sentence.

Read this revision:

Broccoli, **which people often leave uneaten**, is very nutritious.

