

adverbial clauses

The last of the three main kinds of subordinate clause that we will look at is the **adverbial clause**. We are already familiar with adverbials: sentence elements that add something to the meaning of the sentence, but are separable from subject, object, or complement phrases or from verb phrases. Adverbials may be adverbs, nouns, NPs, prepositional phrases - or entire clauses, in which case (as with other kinds of subordinate clause) they represent a separate sentence that has been made dependent and now modifies the main clause of the "host" sentence.

Adverbial clauses are often introduced by **subordinating conjunctions**. A subordinating conjunction signals how the adverbial affects the meaning of the main clause. Much of the time, all you need to do to subordinate a sentence adverbially is to introduce it with a subordinator:

- After the neighbors caught him in the trap, Tweedy moved to our house.
- Tweedy eats kibble, because he doesn't like Friskies L'il Gravies.
- Tweedy's favorite place to sleep, when he can't go outside, is the back of the futon.

Adverbial clauses can roam around a sentence, serving functions much like other similarly mobile kinds of adverbials. Compare:

- Tweedy eats kibble, reluctantly. (adverb adverbial)
- Tuesday, Tweedy moved to our house. (noun adverbial)
- Tweedy's favorite place to sleep, on rainy afternoons, is the back of the futon. (PP adverbial)

Many adverbial clauses are introduced by a participle, without a subordinator.

- Tucking his tail between his legs, Tweedy squeezed past the gate.
- Tweedy sat still, surprised by the sudden noise.

Participial adverbial clauses are prone to the famous "dangling participle" problem. Sometimes a "dangler" really can get in the way of comprehension in written language. Because the adverbial clause is mobile and not strongly associated with the implied subject of its verb, it can get nearer to a subject it doesn't belong with:

- Jumping out of the litter box, I saw Tweedy chase a bird.

A key use of adverbial clauses is in conditional sentences, often with the subordinator *if*:

- If you feed Tweedy this week, I will walk your dog next week.
- Tweedy will follow you around, if he likes you.