Sentence Structure--Larger Constituents HANDOUT

I. Larger Constituents of a Sentence

We have been learning about the main sentence patterns and what normally fills the various function slots. S is usually a noun; OC and SC are usually nouns or adjectives; DO and IO are usually nouns. But, it is quite possible (and frequent) that something else can fill the slot besides what we normally expect. For example, the S slot could be filled by an adjective functioning nominally (a *nominal* is anything that is not a noun but functions like a noun does):

"The *righteous* are bold."
 S   V   SC

The S slot could be filled by a prepositional phrase:

"*Above the sea* is the best place for me."
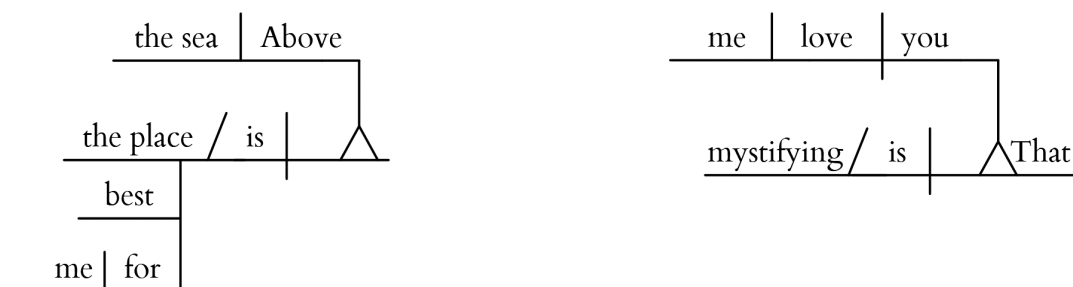 S   V   SC

The S slot could even be filled by a whole clause!:

That you love me is mystifying.
 S   V   SC

If a prepositional phrase or a clause happens to fill a nominal function slot, you would put it on a standard attached to the place on the base-line where that function slot would appear:

II. Types of Clauses

This brings us to a very important matter about sentences that we must understand in order to analyze properly the various clauses: some clauses can stand alone, while other clauses are integral parts of larger clauses and not able to stand alone. Let's provide a few terms and definitions to help clarify matters.

A. Basic Terms

Independent clauses: Also known as *matrix clauses[1] or main clauses*. These are clauses that can stand alone, contain a predicate and at least an implied (if not explicit) subject, and express a proposition. Exx.:

> Martha burned the soup.
> Martha made Jesus a meal.
> You are beautiful.

Each of these clauses are independent, are able to stand alone, and form a complete grammatical thought.

Dependent clauses: Also known as *embedded clauses or subordinate clauses*. These are clauses that are embedded as constituents in a larger clause and can stand for nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. They cannot stand alone like an independent clause can. Exx.:

> We love *because He first loved us*. [adverbial clause, modifies "love"]
> Paul, *who was an apostle*, wrote Galatians. [relative clause, modifies "Paul"]
> I know *that Ivan loves me*. [nominal clause, the DO of "I know"]

Notice that each of these dependent clauses-- *because He first loved us, who was an apostle, that Ivan loves me* --cannot stand on its own grammatically; they each need the rest of the independent/matrix clause to make sense.

Please notice as well that the first three sample sentences under "independent clauses" are all *independent clauses*. Be aware that the three sample sentences under "dependent clauses," when taken as whole sentences, are *also independent clauses* that can stand alone. In the latter three sentences, it is only a *portion of the independent clause* that, taken by itself, cannot stand alone. What this means, then, is that [1] some independent clauses have no dependent clauses, and [2] some independent clauses do have dependent clauses. With this in mind, we can consider a few more definitions.

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[1] The term *matrix clause* is usually used to refer to an independent clause that *also* contains a subordinate clause. When the term *matrix clause* is used, it is often paired with the term *embedded clause*. See more below.

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Simple sentence: an independent clause containing *no dependent clauses.* Ex.: "Jack loves Mary."

Mary | loves | Jack
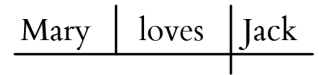
Complex sentence: an independent clause containing *at least one dependent clause.* Ex.: "Jack loves Mary because she rides motorcyles."

Mary | loves | Jack
because
motorcyles | rides | she
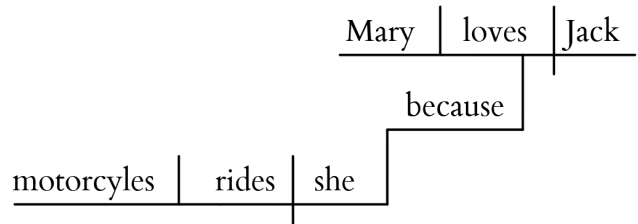
Compound sentence: a sentence that contains two independent clauses joined by a *coordinating conjunction* like "and, but, yet, however, rather" (and not a *subordinating conjunction* like "because, when, while, after, etc."). In a compound sentence, each independent clause could stand by itself.   Ex.: "Jack loves Mary, and she rides motorcyles."

Mary | loves | Jack
and
motorcyles | rides | she
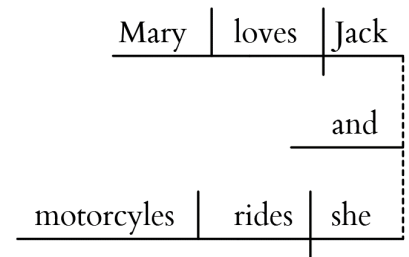
B. Types of Subordinate Clauses

1. *Relative Clauses*: These are usually introduced by the relative pronouns *who(m), which, or that* and usually function adjectivally to modify a noun. Consider the two exx below, and notice what kind of grammatical unit is modifying the word *man*:

 I know the *terrible* man. [Adjective]
 I know the man, *who is terrible*. [Relative clause]

Since the relative clause serves to modify a noun, just as an adjective does, then you would diagram such a clause by placing it *below* the noun's base-line where you'd normally put an adjective. The relative clause would be connected by a dotted line to the main clause; the dotted line will connect the relative pronoun to the antecedent of the main clause. Notice the structural similarity of the diagrams of these two sentences:

the man | know | I
terrible

the man | know | I
terrible / is | who
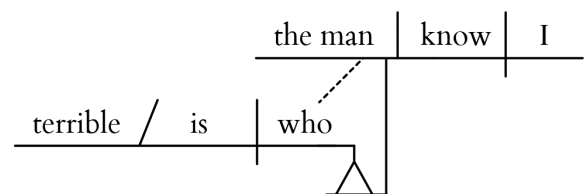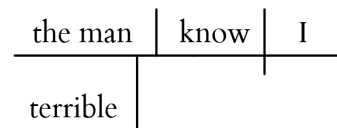
2. *Nominal Clauses*: These are subordinate clauses that function as noun phrases (nominally); that is, they fill a noun function within the sentence. As we've seen, nouns usually fill the DO slot, but so could a nominal clause. Consider these two exx.:

   I know *Ivan*. [DO = noun]
   I know *that Ivan is terrible*. [DO = nominal clause]

Again, to diagram the nominal clause, you'd place it on a standard in the same place that a normal noun would go:
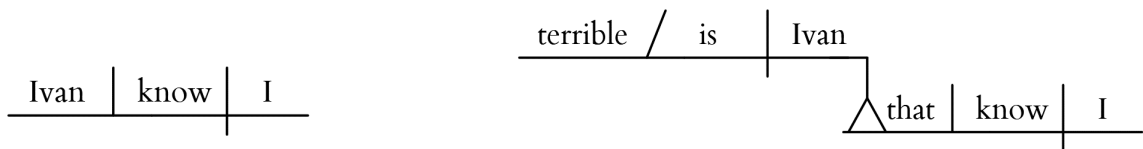
3. *Adverbial Clauses*: These are subordinate clauses that are introduced by subordinating conjunctions and serve to modify verb phrases (like an *adverb* does). They can be subcategorized into a number of different types, just as there are a variety of types of adverbs: temporal (indicating the timing of the action in the subordinate clause compared to the verb of the main clause), causal (providing the grounds/reason for the verbal action main clause), purpose, condition, etc. Consider these two exx.:

   I came *yesterday*. [Temporal adverb]
   I came *before today arrived*. [Temporal adverbial clause]

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