

Making English Grammar Meaningful and Useful

Mini Lesson #16

Noun Clauses: Useful Structures for Gossip

The **purpose** of this lesson is to present characteristics of **Noun Clauses**.

Noun Clauses are word groups that are the **subjects** or **objects** of sentences in which they are found. When they are sentence **subjects**, they are followed by the main verb of the sentence. When they follow the main verb of a sentence, they are usually **objects** of the sentences in which they are found. The two possible noun clause types are illustrated with these sentences:

That he would speak at the conference was announced last week.

Last week the president announced **that he would speak at the conference**.

Notice that the **Connector 'that'** is used for both **Noun Clauses**. In some cases when the **Noun Clause** is the object of the sentence, the **Connector** can be deleted. This is the case with the second example above. You can delete the word **'that'** from the sentence.

Other **Connectors** often used with **Noun Clauses** are the words **'if'**, **'whether'** and WH-question words such as **'when'**, **'where'**, **'why'**, etc.

Noun Clauses are often used in an English structure known as **Reported Speech** where a speaker wants to report what another speaker has said. These are some examples of **Reported Speech**:

The student said **that the homework was very difficult**.

The teacher asked **how many students had finished the homework**.

Most of the students said **that they had finished the homework**.

One particular problem with **Reported Speech** is when a reporter wants to report a question that someone else has asked. There is a tendency to keep the question structure in the reported speech instead of converting it to a statement structure. Look at the following example. The third sentence illustrates this problem.

The mother said, **"What time did you get home last night?"**

The mother asked her daughter **what time she got home last night**.

*The mother asked her daughter **what time did she get home last night**.*

Notice that there is only a question when the mother asked it. When the question is reported, it is a statement, not a question. The third sentence is not grammatical.

Noun Clauses are often used with verbs like '**hope**', '**wish**', '**think**', '**know**' '**understand**', and similar verbs.