SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

CEFR Level C2 — Mastery

English Language Worksheets | 4 Worksheets + Answer Key

Worksheet 1: Subordination as a Rhetorical Instrument

At C2, clause ranking governs emphasis, irony and moral positioning.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

Rhetorical uses of subordination

Device	Effect	Example
demotion by subordination	Bury the damaging fact in a subordinate clause	“The minister, who lied twice, has our confidence.”
periodic suspension	Stack subordinate clauses; withhold the main clause	“When the votes were counted, when the hall emptied, he wept.”
cumulative subordination	Append clauses after the main clause; drift	“She left, saying nothing, taking nothing, looking back once.”
concessive irony	Grant a point in a clause that annihilates it	“Generous though the offer was, it changed nothing.”
nominal relative as verdict	‘What … is …’ fronts, then delivers	“What he never explains is where the money went.”
subjunctive as authority	The mandative form asserts institutional will	“We require that he be removed.”
fragment as subordinate	A stranded subordinate clause lands as a blow	“He apologised. Because he had to.”

PART A — **Identify the device**

Name the device in each sentence and explain its rhetorical effect in context.

1. “The chairman, whose brother won the tender, has ordered a full inquiry.”
Context: an investigative report

Device: _____ Effect: _____

2. “What the committee never asked is who had authorised the payment.”
Context: a newspaper leader

Device: _____ Effect: _____

3. “When the last objection was overruled, when the final vote was taken, when the doors were opened to the waiting press, the chairman smiled.”
Context: a political novel

Device: _____ Effect: _____

4. “They published a correction. Eventually. On page nineteen.”
Context: a media column

Device: _____ Effect: _____

PART B — **Transform for effect**

Rewrite each sentence using the device indicated. The effect must be deliberate.

1 Original: “The director has been censured twice. He denies wrongdoing.”
Device: demotion by subordination (bury the censure)
→ _____

2 Original: “The report is silent about who profited.”
Device: nominal relative as verdict
→ _____

3 Original: “The offer was generous, but it changed nothing.”
Device: concessive irony (fronted)
→ _____

Score: _____ / 14

Worksheet 2: Precision — Embedding, Extraction & Ambiguity

Mastery means controlling attachment, depth and recoverability.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

PART A — **Study the distinctions**

Contrast	Distinction
that (complementiser) vs that (relative)	the first introduces a noun clause; the second replaces a noun
extraposition vs fronting	extraposition respects end-weight; fronting defies it for emphasis
reduction vs ellipsis	reduction changes the verb form; ellipsis deletes recoverable words
low vs high attachment	which noun does the subordinate clause modify?
subjunctive vs indicative that-clause	‘insist that he go’ (demand) vs ‘insist that he goes’ (assert a fact)

Precision cloze: complete each sentence with the ONE form whose logic and register fit exactly.

1. The tribunal insisted that the document _____ disclosed in full.
2. She insisted that she _____ nothing of the arrangement.
3. _____ the auditors resigned was never satisfactorily explained.
4. _____ is arguable that the two accounts cannot both be true.
5. Much _____ the committee protested, the decision stood.
6. The evidence, _____ thin, was allowed to stand.
7. _____ he intended by the remark remains obscure.
8. It is vital that no member _____ informed before the vote.

PART B — **Resolve the ambiguity**

Each sentence is ambiguous. Explain the ambiguity, then rewrite it twice — once for each reading.

1. “The lawyer told the client that he had lied.”
   Ambiguity: _____
   Reading A: _____
   Reading B: _____
2. “She said on Tuesday she would resign.”
   Ambiguity: _____
   Reading A: _____
   Reading B: _____
3. “The brother of the witness who was threatened has fled.”
   Ambiguity: _____
   Reading A: _____
   Reading B: _____

Score: _____ / 14

Worksheet 3: Style Analysis & Rewriting

How subordination carries argument, cadence and concealed judgement.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

PART A — **Analytical reading**

> *That the money had gone was not in dispute. Where it had gone, and who had authorised its going, were questions the inquiry, though it sat for three years, contrived never quite to ask. It heard from officials who could not recall, from consultants whose invoices had been mislaid, and from a treasurer, since retired to Portugal, who declined to attend. What the final report recommends is that procedures be reviewed. It does not recommend that anyone be prosecuted. When at last the volumes were published — four of them, indexed, bound, and unread — the story had long since ceased to be news. Which was, of course, the point.*

1. Identify FIVE subordinate structures and classify each.

_____

_____

_____

2. Analyse the opening two sentences. What is the effect of fronting the that-clause and then the wh-clauses?

_____

_____

3. ‘that procedures be reviewed’ / ‘that anyone be prosecuted’ — name the structure and explain the rhetorical work of the contrast.

_____

_____

4. ‘Which was, of course, the point.’ Identify the structure and explain why the writer leaves it stranded.

_____

_____

PART B — **Neutralise the style**

Rewrite the passage's content as three neutral sentences of institutional reporting, stripping every rhetorical subordination. Then note in one sentence what is lost.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What is lost: _____

Score: _____ / 16

Worksheet 4: Extended Writing — The Architecture of Subordination

Deploy the full repertoire with deliberate, controlled effect.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

PART A **The task**

Write a persuasive, investigative or literary passage (200–250 words) on a subject of your choosing. Requirements: at least SIX distinct subordinate structures, of which at least ONE periodic sentence and ONE instance of demotion by subordination used ironically; a consistent register. Underline and label each target structure.

Self-check before submitting	✓
Six or more distinct subordinate structures, each labelled	
At least one periodic sentence (main clause withheld)	
At least one ironic demotion by subordination	
Mandative subjunctive used correctly, if used at all	
No dangling participles; attachment unambiguous	
End-weight respected except where defied deliberately	

Word count: _____ Structures labelled: _____ / 6

Score: _____ / 35

ANSWER KEY & TEACHER NOTES

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Worksheet 1 – Rhetorical Devices

#	Question / Item	Answer / Guidance
A1	'whose brother won the tender'	**Demotion by subordination — the conflict of interest is tucked into a relative clause while the main clause reports his propriety, letting the reader convict him**
A2	'What the committee never asked …'	**Nominal relative as verdict — fronts the omission, then delivers the damning question in end-focus**
A3	'When …, when …, when …'	**Periodic suspension with anaphora — three subordinate clauses delay the main clause; the trivial payload ('smiled') lands with disproportionate weight, implying triumph over process**
A4	'Eventually. On page nineteen.'	**Fragments as emphasis — the stranded adverbials enact the grudging, buried correction; each full stop is an accusation**
B1	demotion	**e.g. 'The director, who has twice been censured, denies wrongdoing.'**
B2	nominal relative	**e.g. 'What the report never says is who profited.'**
B3	concessive irony	**e.g. 'Generous though the offer was, it changed nothing.'**

Worksheet 2 – Precision & Ambiguity

#	Question / Item	Answer / Guidance
A	Gaps 1–8 in order	**1 be (subjunctive: demand), 2 knew (indicative: assert a fact), 3 Why (or That), 4 It, 5 as, 6 though, 7 What, 8 be**
B1	pronoun reference	**'he' may be the lawyer or the client. A: 'The lawyer admitted to the client that he himself had lied.' B: 'The lawyer told the client that the client had lied.'**
B2	adverbial attachment	**'on Tuesday' may modify 'said' or 'would resign'. A: 'On Tuesday she said she would resign.' B: 'She said she would resign on Tuesday.'**
B3	relative attachment	**'who was threatened' may modify 'the brother' or 'the witness'. A: 'The witness's brother, who was threatened, has fled.' B: 'The brother of the threatened witness has fled.'**

Worksheet 3 – Style Analysis

#	Question / Item	Answer / Guidance
Q1	Five structures + types	**'That the money had gone' (noun, subject); 'Where it had gone, and who had authorised its going' (noun clauses, subjects); 'though it sat for three years' (adverbial concession, parenthetical); 'who could not recall' / 'whose invoices had been mislaid' (relative); 'since retired to Portugal' (verbless/non-finite); 'What the final report recommends' (nominal relative); 'that procedures be reviewed' (noun, subjunctive); 'When at last the volumes were published' (adverbial time); 'Which was, of course, the point.' (sentence-relative fragment)**

#	Question / Item	Answer / Guidance
Q2	the fronted clauses	**Both defy end-weight deliberately. The that-clause concedes the uncontested fact so it can be dismissed; the wh-clauses then occupy subject position as the questions that matter — and the sentence's long delay before 'contrived never quite to ask' enacts the inquiry's own evasion**
Q3	the two subjunctives	**Mandative subjunctive after 'recommend'. The parallel structures set an anodyne recommendation against a withheld one; the second sentence's flat negation ('It does not recommend that anyone be prosecuted') delivers the indictment through symmetry alone**
Q4	'Which was, of course, the point.'	**A sentence-relative clause left as a deliberate fragment. Stranded, it acquires the force of a verdict — the delay was not incompetence but design — and 'of course' feigns the reader's prior agreement**
B	Neutral rewrite	**e.g. 'Funds were unaccounted for. A three-year inquiry heard evidence from officials, consultants and a former treasurer. Its report recommends a review of procedures.' Lost: irony, cadence, and the concealed accusation that the inquiry was designed to fail**

Worksheet 4 – Extended Writing Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor	Marks
Structural range	Six or more distinct subordinate structures, deliberately deployed and labelled	0–8
Advanced structures	Periodic sentence + ironic demotion, both effective	0–8
Register & control	Register sustained; clause ranking governs emphasis precisely	0–7
Accuracy	Subjunctive, attachment, punctuation and reduction all error-free	0–6
Effect	The passage genuinely persuades or moves; subordination earns its place	0–6