



Institute for
Excellence in
Writing

Listen. Speak. Read. Write. Think!

info@IEW.com • 800.856.5815

Sentence Openers: #2 or #5?

By Jill Pike

Question: How can you tell the difference between a prepositional opener (#2) and a clausal opener (#5) since some words, like *since* or *after*, could begin either?

Answer: There are a few words you'll find in a list of prepositions that can do more than just start prepositional phrases. Words like *since* and *after* are double agents. They can be prepositions, but they can also be (brace yourselves!) "subordinating conjunctions that start adverb clauses."

In truth, our very friendly list of clausal starters (*when, while, where, as, since, if, although, because*, or *www.asia.b*) is actually a set of "subordinating conjunctions that start adverb clauses."

So, how do we figure out when *since* and *after* are acting as clausal starters and when they are just acting as prepositions? Easy! They are clausals when there is a verb involved. Here are some examples of *www.asia.b* words (or other subordinating conjunctions) beginning a clause:

- [5] **When we go to the store**, I am going to buy some eggplant.
- [5] **Although I love zucchini**, I crave eggplant.
- [5] **Since I love eggplant**, I eat it every day.
- [5] **After you eat my eggplant surprise**, you will agree that eggplant is the best.

These examples illustrate why the clausal starters are called "subordinating conjunctions that start adverb clauses." Let's break down that mouthful of a phrase so we can understand it better:

- *Subordinating*: The clause is not a complete sentence. ("When we go to the store" can't stand alone.)
- *Conjunctions*: The *www.asia.b* word attaches the clause to a complete sentence—a main clause.
- *Adverb*: The entire clause is serving as an adverb, telling *how, when, where, in what way, or to what extent*.
- *Clauses*: Clauses have verbs. See how every one of the above clauses has a verb?

On the other hand, when a word like *since* or *after* starts a prepositional phrase, there is no verb:

- [2] **After the party** we'll eat eggplant.
- [2] **Since Sunday of last week**, I have craved eggplant.
- [2] **Before class** we'll have to get some eggplant.
- [2] **As a class** we'll make eggplant surprise.
- [2] **Until yesterday** I had never tried eggplant ice cream.

The main thing to remember about #2 and #5 openers is that #5 clausal openers must have a comma while only long #2 prepositional openers (five or more words) require one. The comma is optional for short #2 prepositional openers. This is not crucial to teach at the elementary level, but middle and high school students should learn this as it comes up in their writing. Teaching it at the point of need will make it much more memorable!

For more detailed explanations and for practice in correctly identifying #2 and #5 openers, check out the [Fix It! Grammar](#) program (especially Grammar Glossary pp. G-13, G-38, and G-42).

This article first appeared on the [IEW Blog](#) on August 26, 2015.

info@IEW.com • 800.856.5815

© 2015 by The Institute for Excellence in Writing. The above article is available at [IEW.com/blogs](#) for your personal use or for distribution. Permission given to duplicate complete & unaltered.