

Lesson 3 – Sentence-initial Indentations

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Sentence-initial Indentations: Teaching Subordinate phrases/clauses

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROPE - LESSON THREE

For more on our [‘Other Side of the Rope’](#) lesson series, and how to get started with Cascade Reading – [see our Introductory post](#). You can also [download the PDF](#) for this lesson.

Principle 3 of Cascade Format

SUMMARY:

In the Cascade format, parts of a sentence that *modify*– or *describe*– other parts of the sentence are indented *under* the part they are describing. This statement is referred to as **Principle 2 of the Cascade Format**. In [Lesson 2](#) we saw that this principle applies to direct objects and also subordinate clauses. In that case, the subordinate clauses we addressed all occurred as part of a complex direct object– that is, a direct object that had a subordinate clause modifier.

In this lesson, we look at subordinate clauses and phrases that occur **before** the sentence. The fact that they occur at the beginning of the sentence means that they are providing introductory– or background– information to set up a context for understanding the main part of the sentence. Since they stand in this *modifying* relationship with respect to the main sentence (i.e., the phrase or clause *describes* the main clause), the entire phrase or clause will be indented *with respect to* the main clause. This is the same idea as **Principle 2**, but the Cascade looks distinctive because the first part of the sentence is indented even though there is nothing before it. We refer to this pattern as **Principle 3 of the Cascade Format** in order to highlight the special function of introductory information. However, the underlying logic of indenting introductory information echoes that of Principle 2. Described more generally, parts of the sentence that modify– or describe– other parts of the sentence are indented **with respect to** the part they are describing.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be introduced to the concept of background, or contextual information.
- Students will observe that contextual information can occur in a variety of syntactic structures, including as simple and complex adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases, and entire clauses.
- Students will understand that contextual information is subordinate to the main sentence.
- Students will understand that in Cascade Format, all types of subordinate information are indented with respect to the part of the sentence they describe.

SAMPLE SENTENCES:

This lesson will demonstrate Cascades for the sentences below:

The dog barked.

Early in the morning, the dog barked.

Across the street, the dog barked.

Since the kids were playing in the yard, the dog barked.

After breaking the piñata, the children ate birthday cake.

Standing on her tiptoes, Mary reached the cookies in the cabinet.

Although Harry was suspicious of his classmate, he went with him to the park.

Harry went with his classmate to the park although he was suspicious of him.

LESSON – DIRECT TEACHING OF SKILL

Introduction

We learned previously that Cascade Format makes it easy to see the subject (a.k.a. the **who**) and the predicate (a.k.a. the **do**) of a sentence by lining them up together. For example, we saw the sentence:

The dog barked.

```
The dog
barked.
```

The simple subject is “the dog” and the simple predicate is “barked”.

Very often sentences contain initial information that gives background, or context, about the situation described in the main sentence. This can tell the reader **WHEN**, **WHERE**, **WHY** or **HOW** the events in the main sentence happened. We will see that the Cascade Format treats all of this information in the same way– by indenting it with respect to the main sentence it is describing.

Modeling

Let’s start with the example above, and add a phrase that says **WHEN** the dog barked. For example: Early in the morning, the dog barked.

```
| Early in the morning,
the dog
barked.
```

This sentence is preceded by the adverbial phrase “early in the morning” which tells **WHEN** the dog barked. Because it gives background information about the main sentence, the phrase is indented with respect to the main sentence.

Here is another example:

Across the street, the dog barked.

```
| Across the street,
the dog
barked.
```

In this example, the main sentence is preceded by a prepositional phrase that tells **WHERE** the dog barked. Since this is background, or contextual, information that describes the dog’s barking, it is likewise indented with respect to the main sentence.

Contextual information can occur in many different types of syntactic constructions, but no matter what type, it is indented with respect to the main clause in the sentence.

The following example shows contextual information in its own clause– called a subordinate clause– which precedes the main sentence. In this case, the subordinate clause tells **WHY** the dog barked.

Since the kids were playing in the yard, the dog barked.

```
| Since the kids
were playing
| in the yard,
the dog
barked.
```

This example is especially interesting because it shows that the **entire** preceding clause is indented with respect to the main clause, but it also shows that the **preceding** clause follows the same formatting principles we already discussed. It is easy to find the simple subject and predicate in the subordinate clause because they are aligned (**Lesson 1**). “The kids” is the subject of the subordinate clause, and “were playing” is the simple predicate of the subordinate clause. “In the yard” is a prepositional phrase that modifies the simple predicate because it tells **WHERE** they played. It is part of the complex predicate, but since it is a modifier, it is indented under the simple predicate (**Lesson 2**). The introductory word “since” is a special type of linking word that signals a causal relationship between the subordinate and the main clause– it signals **WHY** the main clause happened. Because it joins two clauses, with one explaining the other, it is called a **subordinate conjunction**.

Here is another example:

After breaking the piñata, the children ate birthday cake.

```
| After breaking
| | the piñata,
the children
ate
| birthday cake.
```

What is the contextual (or background) information?

After breaking the pinata.

How do you know?

Because the whole phrase is indented with respect to the main clause. It tells WHEN they ate the cake.

What did the children break?

The piñata, because it is indented under 'breaking'. It is a direct object of the verb.

What is the main clause?

The children ate birthday cake.

What is the simple subject of the main clause?

The children

What is the simple predicate of the main clause?

Ate

What is the complex predicate of the main clause?

Ate birthday cake.

Here is another example:

Standing on her tiptoes, Mary reached the cookies in the cabinet.

```
| Standing
| | on her tiptoes,
Mary
reached
| the cookies
| | in the cabinet.
```

What is the contextual information?

Standing on her tiptoes.

How do you know?

Because it is indented with respect to the main sentence. It tells HOW Mary reached.

What is the subject of the sentence?

Mary

What is the simple predicate?

Reached

How do you know?

Because they are aligned.

What did Mary reach?

The cookies

How do you know?

The phrase is indented under reach. “Cookies” is the direct object of reach.

Where did Mary reach?

In the cabinet.

How do you know?

The phrase is indented under reach.

A GENERAL RULE ABOUT SUBORDINATE INFORMATION

Now we’ll learn more about subordinate information with a more complicated example:

Although Harry was suspicious of his classmate, he went with him to the park.

```
Although Harry
was suspicious
  | of his classmate,
he
went
  | with him
  | to the park.
```

What is the contextual information?

“Although Harry was suspicious of his classmate.” This is an entire clause that is **subordinate** to the main clause of the sentence.

How do you know?

It is indented at the beginning of the sentence. It gives the background information about HOW Harry was feeling when the event described in the main clause happened.

What is the event described in the main clause?

Harry went with his classmate to the park.

How do you know?

The simple subject and predicate (he went) are all the way to the left. They are not indented. This means they are the main clause.

What did Harry do?

He went

How did he go?

With his classmate

Where did he go?

To the park

Each of these last few phrases is **indented in** from ‘went’ because it describes more details about Harry’s going. They are not direct objects, like we learned about in [Lesson 2](#), but they are subordinate to the previous phrase because they depend on that phrase for their meaning. Just like a subordinate clause at the beginning of a sentence is indented with respect to the main clause that it modifies, these phrases are indented with respect to the previous phrase that they modify.

CLOSURE

Today we introduced the concept of background or contextual information that occurs at the beginning of a sentence. We saw that this information can occur in a variety of syntactic structures (e.g., prepositional phrases, adverbs, full sentences), and generally describes WHEN, WHERE, WHY, or HOW a main event happened. The main event is described in the *main clause* of the sentence, and the background, or contextual information is described in a subordinate clause (if a full sentence) or a subordinate phrase (if not full sentence.)

In Cascade Format, the subordinate clause or phrase is **always** indented with respect to the phrase it describes or modifies. In this lesson, we saw that when it occurs at the beginning of a sentence, as background or contextual information, it is indented at the beginning. This makes the shape of the Cascade distinctive, because the first part of the sentence is indented **in** with respect to the main sentence. It is important to realize that ALL of the subordinate information is indented, even if it also has its own subordinate information like direct objects or modifying prepositional phrases. The entire subordinate phrase starts from a position indented **in** from the main clause and then further indentations as necessary in the subordinate clause are made from that point.

It is always easy to identify a subordinate clause or phrase at the beginning of the sentence because the first part of the sentence does not begin all the way to the left. Rather, the subordinate information is indented following the usual Cascade Rules, and only at the end of the subordinate information is the position of the main clause shown— all the way to the left.

On your Exit Ticket, describe what contextual information is.

- How is it shown in the Cascade Format?
- What do we mean when we say that contextual information is subordinate?
- Can you give two examples of subordinate phrases that give contextual information? Show how they would be positioned in Cascade format.

EXIT TICKET

Contextual information is information that gives background for the main event described in the sentence. Since it **describes** the main event of the sentence, it **depends** on the main clause, and is therefore called a subordinate phrase or clause. It usually tells **WHEN, WHERE, HOW, or WHY** the event happened, and can occur either in a phrase or a clause. In the Cascade Format all of the introductory information is indented *at the beginning* of the Cascade so that the main subject and predicate stand out as being the only thing on the left hand side of the cascade. This means the contextual information is easy to find in the Cascade— it is always indented with respect to the main clause of the sentence.

Subordinate phrases can be adverbs or adverbial phrases that tell **WHEN**, such as “Yesterday” or “After a long delay” or “For as long as I can remember.” Subordinate phrases can also be prepositional phrases that tell where, such as “In the backyard” or “In school today” or “At last year’s birthday party”. They can also be entire clauses that explain motivation or reasons for something, like “Since Mary didn’t agree with Tom’s answer...” or “Because Talya wanted to do well in school...” or “Every year since I can remember...”

These examples sound like they would occur at the beginning of the sentence. However, subordinate phrases and clauses can also occur at the end of the sentence. Consider a variation of the sentence we saw above: “Harry agreed to go with his classmate to the park, although he was suspicious of him.” We saw that when it occurs at the beginning of the sentence the subordinate clause “although Harry was suspicious of his classmate,” is indented with respect to the main clause “he went.” When it occurs after the main clause, it is also indented with respect to “he went,” as below:

```
Harry
went
  with his classmate
  to the park
  although he
  was suspicious
  of him.
```

The general rule is that subordinate clauses are always indented with respect to the information they modify.

LESSON SENTENCES

This lesson demonstrated Cascades for the sentences below:

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Since the kids were playing in the yard, the dog barked.

After breaking the piñata, the children ate birthday cake.

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ADDITIONAL SAMPLE SENTENCES*

Copy and paste these sentences into Cascade Explorer to demonstrate the concepts explained here. Try out highlighting and labeling tools to show students how the Cascade changes for related sentences from this list.

For more practice with contextual information that occurs as an adverb.

Early in the morning Carlos dived into the refreshing swimming pool.
Suddenly the lights went out.
Eagerly anticipating the results, the audience waited in suspense.

For more practice with contextual information that occurs as a prepositional phrase.

After 45 minutes, the bus finally came.
During the day skunks are usually sleeping.
In the corner of the room, a small table held a vase of fresh flowers.

For more practice with contextual information that occurs as an entire clause.

Before the sun rose, the travelers set out on their journey.
Because she wasn't feeling well, Sarah decided to stay home from work.
When the clock strikes midnight, the enchanted carriage will turn into a pumpkin.*

*Notice here that 'when' is subordinate information for 'the clock strikes' and the entire clause 'when the clock strikes midnight' is contextual information for 'the enchanted carriage will turn...'. The result is that 'When' is indented twice, once because of 'the clock strikes' and once because of 'the carriage will turn'.

To show what happens when the same information is positioned after the main clause.

Carlos dived into the refreshing swimming pool early in the morning.
Skunks are usually sleeping during the day.
The enchanted carriage will turn into a pumpkin when the clock strikes midnight.

*NOTE: Try out your own sentences to illustrate these concepts! However, be aware that some errors in the Cascades are possible, because this is a Beta version of the algorithm (i.e., still under development). We encourage teachers to test out their sentences **before** using them in the classroom, in case unexpected results occur.

LESSON RESOURCES

[Download the PDF](#) for this lesson.

[Sentence Building Exercise](#) provided by Literacy How