



Noughts and crosses – subordinating conjunction style

This is a great game to play once the children understand subordinating conjunctions and it will really build their confidence while being an entertaining challenge. It's also a good game to play at a staff meeting to help build staff confidence with the rather obscure need in the 2016 grammar test in England for children to be able to spot the difference between a word like before when it functions as a subordinating conjunction, as opposed to when it functions as a preposition.

Find an entertaining picture. Just Google "Mouse in a helmet" and grand images of a mouse in a crash hat approaching a mouse trap loaded with cheese appear.



Provide the class with a noughts-and-crosses grid of subordinating conjunctions. If you want to provide more help, you could highlight the words that could also function as prepositions, as illustrated below:

if	although	while
because	as	before
since	when	after

The ultimate challenge is to see if they can use all three words as subordinating conjunctions in one coherent sentence.

Warm up with the easy version of the game. The children should work in pairs. Each child in turn selects a conjunction and creates a complex sentence using that subordinating conjunction to describe the picture in some way. (The child who starts the game, if wise, will pick as for their starter word.) The first child to achieve a diagonal, horizontal or vertical row of correctly structured sentences wins.

Now the real game begins. Challenge the whole class to see if they can come up with one multi-clause sentence that contains all the three words in any of the rows. Their sentence has to make complete sense and describe the picture in some way. They have to be able to say whether they have used the words as conjunctions or prepositions.

If you're struggling for a possible answer, here's one for you:

"Although the mouse put on a crash hat when approaching the cheese in the trap, it was still hurt because the hat was faulty." (This claims the middle vertical line).

A final challenge

If the class is really confident with this, present them with this challenge. Is the word before in the sentence below a preposition or a subordinating conjunction? You must be able to explain your decision.

"The cat I owned before never hunted birds, so I'm rather cross with this one."

Answer: It's a preposition.

Explanation: Although this is a two-clause sentence, the word before is not joining the clauses (so is). The expanded form of the sentence would be: The cat I owned before this one never hunted birds, so I'm rather cross with this one. The full phrase is "understood" from the context of the sentence. Therefore the word before is functioning as a preposition.