Commas and Dependent Clauses

One of the most common comma mistakes has to do with where to put a comma in a sentence that has both a dependent and an independent clause. Not sure what that means? Don’t worry, just keep reading.

Clauses: The Building Blocks of Sentences
Clauses are grammatical units that include at least one subject and one complete verb. All sentences are created using one or more clauses. There are two main types of clauses: independent clauses and dependent clauses.

Independent clauses express a complete thought and can stand on their own as sentences.

*Example:* The apple fell.

Dependent clauses begin with subordinating words and cannot stand alone as sentences.

*Example:* Because the apple fell

Complete sentences must include at least one independent clause.

Commas and Dependent (Adverb) Clauses
The adverb clause, the most common type of dependent clause, serves a variety of purposes in the sentence. Some of its most common functions are to indicate time and place, to provide reasons and explanations, and to describe methods, conditions, and outcomes. The adverb clause begins with a subordinating conjunction.

*Common subordinating conjunctions:* as, after, although, because, even though, if, now that, provided, rather than, since, unless, until, when, whereas, whether, and while

If an adverb clause occurs before an independent clause, it is followed by a comma.

*Example:* Because traffic was so heavy, I was late.

If an adverb clause occurs after an independent clause, it is NOT preceded by a comma unless it begins with although, whereas, or some other term that indicates contrast.

*Example:* I was late because traffic was so heavy.

*Example:* I was late, although traffic was relatively light for the time of day.
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