Task: Building Complex Sentences

Situation: Use this task with clients who want help understanding subordinated sentence structure. It is not necessary to go into the details of what constitutes a subordinate or independent clause before assigning the task, although it might be helpful to talk about the difference after the client has completed the task.

Instructions: Ask the client to write 3 long sentences, each of which includes the following elements:

- at least one “who,” “whom,” or “whose”
- at least one “which” or “that”
- a “whether” or “if”
- a “because” or a “since”
- an “although” or a “however”
- a “before,” an “after,” or a “when”

Example: “When the man whose hat I found in the street asked whether I wanted a reward, I told him that because it had cost me no trouble, I wanted no reward, although it would have been nice if he had thanked me.”

Meaning is not important (the sentences can be nonsensical), but they should sound like correct Standard English. Tell them to have fun with it, and to go on as long as they can. Give them 10 minutes or so to finish, then go over the results with them.

Outcome: Practice with subordination, and perhaps a clearer sense of how complex sentences can carry greater weight of meaning, if used correctly. May also help with fragments caused by failed subordination.