The same word may introduce clauses of different kinds. It is therefore wrong to judge a clause from the word which introduces it. The exact nature of each clause should be figured out from the kind of function it serves in the sentence.

Compare:

I don’t know **when he will arrive**. (Here the subordinate clause ‘when he will arrive’ is the object of the verb know. It, therefore, serves as a noun clause.)

Tell me the time **when you intend to return**. (Here the subordinate clause ‘when you intend to return’ modifies the noun time. It is therefore used as an adjective clause.)

**When the cat is away** the mice play. (Here the subordinate clause ‘when the cat is away’ acts as an adverb clause of time modifying the verb play.)

**Notes**

There are as many clauses in a sentence as there are **finite verbs**. Note that **infinitives, participles and gerunds** are not finite verbs.

**For and because**

**For** is a coordinating conjunction. It is used to introduce a coordinate clause. **Because** is a subordinating conjunction. It is used to introduce a subordinate clause.

He did not go out, **for it was raining**. (Here the coordinating conjunction for joins two main clauses ‘he did not go out’ and ‘it was raining’.)

He did not go out **because it was raining**. (Here the subordinating conjunction because joins the principal clause (he did not go out) with the subordinate clause (it was raining).)

**Whether**

In an indirect question **whether** introduces a noun clause.

I don’t know **whether he would come**. (Here the clause introduced by whether acts as the object of the verb know. It is therefore a noun clause.)

In conditional sentences **whether** introduces an adverb clause of condition. It is usually followed by **or**.

You are going to do that job **whether you like it or not**. (Here whether introduces the adverb clause of condition whether you like it or not.)

A sentence put inside inverted commas is always a noun clause.
Indirect questions introduced by *if* or *whether* are noun clauses.

He asked me **whether I liked the idea**. (Here the indirect question ‘whether I liked the question’ acts as the object of the verb asked.)

**When, unless, if, till etc**

After the conjunctions *when, unless, if, till, whether...or, while and though*, the predicate verb ‘to be’ is often understood and not expressed.

I broke my leg **while getting down the ladder**. (= I broke my leg while I was getting down the ladder.)