It all comes down to clauses (no, not that kind)

A clause is simply a group of words that requires a subject and a verb. An independent clause can be very short:

**Jack ran.**

Believe it or not, this is a clause. Moreover, it is what is known as an independent clause, because it can stand on its own as an independent thought.

**While Jack was running very rapidly from the very angry clerk he had cheated.**

Now, you might think that this is an independent clause because it is so much longer than the first clause. However, length has nothing to do with whether or not a clause is an independent or a dependant clause.
This is so important, I’m going to repeat it.

Length has nothing to do with whether or not a clause is an independent or a dependant clause.

A clause is dependent if it has a type of conjunction in front of it that makes it an incomplete thought. In our sample clause the conjunction that makes it a dependent clause is while.
If you took away “while” we would have an independent thought, or clause remaining:

Jack was running very rapidly from the very angry clerk he had cheated.

Make Sense

There is another type of conjunction which can turn an independent clause into a dependent clause. You can find these pretty easily because they are clauses that begin with which, who, or that.

Jack, who was running very rapidly from the very angry clerk he had cheated, began to reconsider the wisdom of his actions.

The group of words “who was running very rapidly from the very angry clerk he had cheated” is actually a clause. It has a subject – who – and a verb – was running – and that’s all you need! However, it is not an independent thought, because it clearly refers to something, in this case Jack. By itself, it would have no meaning.
The first type of dependent clause we talked about is called an adverbial clause.

While Jack was running very rapidly from the very angry clerk he had cheated, he began to think he should be more honest in the future.

Just like an adverb, this type of clause modifies, or adds information to the action that is being performed in the independent clause that is modifies. In this case, the dependent clause explains the condition under which Jack is beginning to think.

The second type of dependent clause we talked about is called an adjective clause.

Jack, who was running very rapidly from the very angry clerk he had cheated, began to reconsider the wisdom of his actions.

Just like an adjective, this type of dependent clause modifies a noun. “Who was running very rapidly from the very angry clerk he had cheated” acts as an adjective, modifying the noun Jack.