A. Background of Research

In learning English, it deals with four basic skills and three components. The four basic skills are listening, reading, speaking and writing. Whereas, the three basic components are phonology, grammar, and vocabulary. Those are should be mastered by the students because those are a key for the students in building a complete mastery of English.

One of the important language components in learning English is grammar. Grammar is description of how the elements of language are systematically combined. According to Swan (1980: XVI) “Mastery of English grammar is very important because grammar is the rule that shows how forms change to show different meaning and how words are combined into sentences”. Grammar also has an essential role in learning English. Through grammar, written or spoken language can be produced as well as receive written or spoken language. Grammar is the basic knowledge to understand language perfectly, without understanding grammar, it is impossible for the students to achieve English skills in writing, speaking, listening and reading.

Among the items of grammar, noun clause is one of topic that should be mastered well. Noun clause is a clause that has s functions as a
noun. Because it functions as a noun, it can be a subject, object, complement, and object of preposition.

Mastering noun clause is important because it is often used both in spoken and written language. For example, if the student wants to say “Mereka tidak tahu betapa pintarnya kamu” in English, they may say “They don’t know how clever are you” if they do not master noun clause. It is incorrect sentence because the order is not correct. The correct order of clause in noun clause for the example above is WH + S + V. So, they should arrange into “They don’t know how clever you are”. This structure and another structure should be mastered by the students otherwise they will have different understanding in conversation because they have different meaning.

Therefore, the writer is interested in knowing about the students’ competence in noun clause in a research entitled “A Study on Students’ Competence in Noun Clause at Sixth Semester Students of English Department of Muhammadiyah University of Purwokerto in Academic Year 2011/2012”.

B. Reasons for Choosing Topic

The reason why the writer plans to conduct this research is because the frequency of the use of noun clause is high both in spoken and written language.
C. Problems of Research

The writer has two problems that are discussed in this research, those are:

1. How good is the English department students’ competence in noun clause?
2. What kinds of error are usually made by students in noun clause?

D. Aims of Research

The objectives of this research are:

1. To find out the level of students’ competence in noun clause.
2. To identify the errors made by the students in noun clause at sixth semester students of English Department of Muhammadiyah University of Purwokerto in academic year 2011/2012”.

E. Clarification of Terms

To understand the items more easily, the terms of the study are clarified as follows:

1. Study
   According to Hornby (1989:839) study is defined as the process of gaining or investigating knowledge of a certain subject.

2. Competence
   a. Ramelan (1992:46) defines that competence refers to person knowledge of his language and her mastery of system of rule of his language.
b. In this paper competence mean that the students mastery or ability in using the one of English structure form in the sentence.

3. Noun Clause

Betty Azar (1998:239), that noun clause is dependent clause that is used as a subject or an object. In the other words, a noun clause is used in the same ways as a noun phrase. A noun clause is also called a nominal clause.

4. The Sixth Semester Students of English Department

The term of the sixth semester students of English Department are the students who are currently studying in the English department at faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Muhammadiyah University of Purwokerto.

F. Research Contributions

The writer hopes that the result of the research can be useful for English teaching learning process, especially in noun clause. The reader can get information about common error made by student when they construct noun clause in sentences. Moreover, the lecturer can improve and more creative in choosing the suitable method in teaching noun clause. Furthermore, it is expected that it will be useful as other sources for other researchers to develop this study to be better.