To be subjacent, means to be lying immediately below. In some uses, X is subjacent to Y if X is one level lower than Y, but not immediately under Y.

Example:

Tam is subjacent to Jas.
(Syntax)

**Immediate subjacency**

Slide 3

![Diagram of immediate subjacency]

**Phrase-specific subjacency**

*E.g. subjacent XP*

Slide 4

![Diagram of phrase-specific subjacency]
Motivation

Chomsky (1973) proposed this to explain why certain correlations between a syntactic trace and its binder are impossible.

Who did the boy pinch?
Who did Mary say the boy pinch?
Mary asked whether the boy pinched Suzie.
*Who did Mary ask whether the boy pinch?

Movement and subjacency

Wh-movement is only possible across subjacent S.
Movement and subjacency

Wh-movement is only possible across subjacent S.

\[ S' \]
\[ S \]
\[ Who \]
\[ Not subjacent \]
\[ Mary asked S' \]
\[ whether \]
\[ The boy pinched X. \]

Summary

Subjacency = sub “one-level down” + adjacent “beside”

In syntax, it can be used to explain attested “movement”, i.e. possible correlations between items in a sentence.

Typically, subjacency works on levels of S (IP, TP, etc) and NP (DP). Such nodes, typically S and NP are called bounding nodes.
Further Reading


The End

Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung (2009)

*An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics.*

Hong Kong Baptist University.