



Understanding Clauses

Types of Clauses

A **clause** is a grammatical structure that has a subject and a verb. Sentences are made up of clauses. There are two main types of clauses:

1. **Independent clause**: a grammatical construction that contains both a subject and verb and also expresses a complete thought.
2. **Dependent clause**: a grammatical construction that contains a subject and verb but doesn't express a complete thought.

Independent Clauses

Independent clauses are complete sentences on their own. The independent clause is the part of the sentence that stands alone. The independent clause in the examples below will be *red and italicized*.

Examples:

1. *The student read the book.*
2. *I wrote one page* because I had time.
3. *This book is great*, and *I love the characters*.

Independent clauses can stand alone, but dependent clauses cannot. Dependent clauses do a lot of work adding richness and context to a sentence, but they need to be anchored to an independent clause to make sense. Below are types of dependent clauses. Note that the critical part of each definition is blue, bolded, and underlined. The clause being discussed will be *red and italicized* in each example.

Dependent Clauses

Dependent clauses can seem like full thoughts, but they don't make sense on their own, usually due to the inclusion of a subordinating conjunction (words like because, if, after, when, during) or missing words.

Examples:

1. *While I brushed my teeth*, I thought about my favorite book.
2. The author is famous *because her book was a bestseller*.
3. Grammar, *which is often considered boring*, is useful.

Notice how none of the italicized clauses could stand alone. The first two could work as answers to a question or in casual conversation, but on their own, they don't quite make sense. If the subordinating conjunction was removed, or the missing subject was added, the dependent clauses would become independent.

1. I brushed my teeth.
2. Her book was a bestseller.
3. Grammar is often considered boring.

Here are four specific types of dependent clauses. Not all dependent clauses fall under these categories.

- **Essential clause:** a clause that provides extra information that is needed in order to correctly identify or specify something about the noun it follows. These are required for the essential meaning to be conveyed correctly.
 - Example: Mia *who is from Germany* wrote a fascinating paper on traveling in Europe.

In this example, Mia being from Germany is an important, necessary part of the work being done in the sentence because her native country gives her insight into the paper being discussed.

- **Non-essential clause:** a clause that provides extra information about the noun it follows but is not needed for the essential meaning of the sentence to be communicated.
 - Example: Jorge, *who is from Colombia*, visited the OU Writing Center.

In this example, Jorge's native country has no bearing on the fact he visited the OU Writing Center. Because this information could be removed without changing the meaning of the sentence, it is surrounded by commas.

- **Relative clause:** a clause that takes the place of an adjective in a sentence. It relates to or describes the noun that it follows. Relative clauses fall under the same categories of essential and non-essential clauses. When they are essential clauses, they are known as restrictive relative clauses. When they are non-essential clauses, they are known as non-restrictive relative clauses.

- **Restrictive relative clause** – provides additional information we need to understand the sentence. This is also known as a defining relative clause.
 - Example: “I bought the book *that was gray*.”
Without the clause, we would not know which book the speaker purchased. Because this information is necessary to our understanding, we do not put commas before or after these clauses.
- **Non-restrictive relative clause:** a clause that provides additional information we do not need to understand the sentence. This is also known as a non-defining relative clause.
 - Example: “My roommate wrote a novel, *which is impressive*.”
In this example, the speaker is telling us they think writing a book is impressive. This is additional information to add intrigue to the sentence, but it could be removed without changing the sentence. This is why it is set off in commas.

Now, let’s look at how clauses can be combined into different types of sentences to do different work.

Types of Sentences

Simple sentences have only one independent clause.

Examples:

1. I love writing.
2. The Writing Center is open six days a week.
3. Charles Dickens wrote *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Compound sentences contain two (or more) related independent clauses joined by 1) a coordinating conjunction, 2) a semicolon, or 3) a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb. The independent clauses must be related to each other; otherwise, it is best to keep them in separate sentences.

Examples:

1. I visited the Writing Center, and they helped me create an outline.
2. My essay needs to be revised; the thesis is unclear.
3. Writing is my favorite hobby; however, sometimes it can be frustrating.

Complex sentences have an independent and a dependent clause. When the dependent clause comes first, it uses a comma, but when it comes second, it does not.

Examples:

1. When I went to the bookstore, I bought three books.
2. I buy books often because I love to read.

Compound complex sentences contain two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses, with a minimum of three clauses total. These sentences are both compound, having two independent clauses, and complex, including a dependent clause.

Examples:

1. When I went to the Writing Center, I worked on my paper, and I got feedback.
2. Reading can be fun, but many people consider it boring because they usually read for school.
3. I took notes while I was in class; after the professor finished teaching, I asked her some questions.



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