

Independent and Dependent Clauses

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to tell the difference between clauses and phrases, and how to recognize independent and dependent clauses when reading and writing. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Phrases

2. Clauses

2a. Independent Clauses

2b. Dependent Clauses

1. Phrases

English sentences are composed of clauses and phrases. Understanding how these two units of information work and how to tell the difference between them is really important because they're both essential elements of clear sentences.

A **phrase** is a small series of words that conveys some meaning and makes up one part of a sentence. Phrases don't have to have subjects and verbs, and they don't need to express a full thought.

Instead, a phrase is just a little chunk of meaning. The most common kind of phrase is a prepositional phrase.

➞ **EXAMPLE** "In the morning," and "Without knowing why" are both prepositional phrases.

See how each of those phrases is just one little piece of information that sets up what is to come in the rest of the sentence? Prepositional phrases are just one of the many types of phrases you can use.

Often, phrases act like parts of speech and can offer additional information to a complete sentence.

➞ **EXAMPLE** In the sentence "For as long as I can remember, I've wanted a Great Dane, one of the largest dog breeds," notice how the underlined phrases add details that help explain more about the subject and the verb.



TERM TO KNOW

Phrase

A small series of words that conveys some meaning.

2. Clauses

Clauses, on the other hand, contain more information. A **clause** is a group of words that includes a subject and a verb.

There are two kinds of clauses:

- Independent
- Dependent

Taking a closer look at the differences between these two types is very important, as you need to be able to put these clauses together correctly to create clear sentences that your readers understand.



TERM TO KNOW

Clause

A group of words that includes a subject and a verb.

2a. Independent Clauses

An **independent clause** is a group of words that can stand alone as a sentence, although it does not have to.

You might remember that a sentence is a subject plus a verb plus a full thought; an independent clause is going to contain all of those elements and thus be able to stand on its own as a sentence, if it wants to.

➞ **EXAMPLE** "The dog sat in the doghouse" is an independent clause because it contains a subject ("the dog"), a verb ("sat"), and a complete thought (what the dog did and where).

This kind of sentence is called a simple sentence because it has one independent clause. You will learn more about the different sentence types in the next lesson.



TERM TO KNOW

Independent Clause

A clause that can stand alone as a sentence, although it does not have to do so.

2b. Dependent Clauses

A **dependent clause** is a clause that cannot stand on its own as a sentence. It still has a subject and a verb, but it's missing that fully expressed thought that lets an independent clause stand alone.

Therefore, a dependent clause is dependent upon connecting to an independent clause in order to become a full sentence.

➔ **EXAMPLE** "While he was tired" is a dependent clause.

If you wrote this clause as a full sentence, would that be correct? No, because although the dependent clause has a subject ("he") and a verb ("was"), it's missing a complete thought (what was happening during the time he was tired). You need to know what comes before or after this clause in order to understand the thought.



TERM TO KNOW

Dependent Clause

A clause that cannot stand on its own as a sentence.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that sentences are made up of **phrases** and **clauses**. Phrases are small groups of words expressing some meaning, while clauses are groups of words that contain at least one subject and verb. You also learned that there are two types of clauses: **independent clauses**, which can stand on their own or become part of longer sentences, and **dependent clauses**, which cannot stand on their own because they don't contain a fully-expressed idea.

Best of luck in your learning!



TERMS TO KNOW

Clause

A group of words that includes a subject and a verb.

Dependent Clause

A clause that cannot stand on its own as a sentence.

Independent Clause

A clause that can stand alone as a sentence, although it does not have to do so.

Phrase

A small series of words that conveys some meaning.