

Recognize a *clause* when you see one.

A clause is a syntactic construction containing a subject and predicate and forming part of a sentence or constituting a whole simple sentence.

Every clause has *at least* a subject and a verb.

Examples:

He ran – clause

He = subject; ran = verb

The oak tree – not a clause

tree = subject; verb is missing

fell in the forest – not a clause

fell = verb; subject is missing

The oak tree fell in the forest – clause

tree = subject; fell = verb

The Independent Clause

Clauses come in two main types: independent clauses and dependent clauses.

An independent clause is a group of words that contains a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought. An independent clause can stand alone as a sentence.

The standard construction for an independent clause is:

SUBJECT + VERB = complete thought

Example – The boy jumped over the fence.

Every sentence must have at least one independent clause. Otherwise, it is not a sentence; it would be a fragment.

Example – Because the boy jumped over the fence.

This is a fragment because we don't know the rest of the thought. What happened because the boy jumped over the fence?

The Dependent Clause

Dependent clauses can never stand on their own as complete sentences. They express incomplete thoughts.

Examples:

when the dog ran in front of the car

before he eats French toast

because I forgot my homework

What happened to that poor dog? What is his pre-French toast ritual? What happened to that student?

In order to complete these thoughts, the dependent clauses must be attached to independent clauses.

Conjunctions

When a sentence contains more than one clause, conjunctions are used to connect the clauses. There are two main types of conjunctions: coordinating and subordinating.

Coordinating conjunctions connect independent clauses together. There are seven common coordinating conjunctions, and they can be remembered using the mnemonic device FANBOYS.

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

The construction of a sentence with more than one independent clause should look like this:

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE 1 + comma + coordinating conjunction + INDEPENDENT CLAUSE 2

Example:

The boy ran across the street, and his mother chased after him.

Both “The boy ran across the street” and “His mother ran after him” could stand alone as complete sentences, so they must be connected with a coordinating conjunction.

When a sentence contains an independent clause and a dependent clause, a subordinating conjunction must be used. No matter where a dependent clause appears in a sentence, subordinating conjunctions always appear at the beginning of the dependent clause. This means that there are two typical constructions for sentences with one independent clause and one dependent clause:

DEPENDENT CLAUSE + comma + INDEPENDENT CLAUSE

OR

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE + DEPENDENT CLAUSE

Examples:

When the dog ran in front of the car, the driver slammed on his brakes.

The driver slammed on his brakes *when the dog ran in front of the car.*

Notice that the subordinating conjunction (underlined) appears at the beginning of the dependent clause (italicized) in each case. A comma is not needed when a dependent clause follows an independent clause.

Some common subordinating conjunctions:

as, after, although, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, in order to, since, though, unless, until, whatever, when, whenever, where, whether, while

More complicated sentences can combine multiple independent and dependent clauses, but all sentences must have at least one independent clause.