



Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

Clauses II: Common Types of Clauses

In the Writing Center handout “Clauses I,” clauses are explained in simple terms (independent and dependent clauses). This follow-up handout will show more complex applications of dependent clauses, such as being able to identify and properly use **noun, adverb, adjective, and elliptical clauses**. For information about restrictive and nonrestrictive dependent clauses, please refer to the Writing Center handout “Clauses III.”



As mentioned in “Clauses I,” a **dependent clause** (subordinate clause) also contains a subject and a verb, but the meaning is incomplete, such as in the clause: “*when* the ice melted”. What happened *when* the ice melted? A dependent clause cannot stand alone as a complete sentence and therefore must be connected with an independent clause. There are three main types of dependent clauses: **noun, adjective, and adverb** clauses. When identifying dependent clauses, look for these keywords:

that	what	how many	although
whether	where	how far	as
who	when	how long	because
whom	why	how often	everywhere
whose	how	how soon	if
which	how much	after	so

Noun Clauses

A **noun clause** (also called a nominal clause) is a dependent clause that acts like a noun because it can function as a **subject**, **object of a verb**, or **object of a preposition**.

Typically, noun clauses begin with one of the aforementioned keywords such as *who*, *what*, *whether*, and *that*.

Examples of noun clauses:

whether it will rain

when I arrived

what they said

As stated above, all dependent clauses must be attached to an independent clause to form a complete sentence:

I do not know *whether it will rain*.

The sun was out *when I arrived*.

What they said is none of your business.

Forms of Noun Clauses

As previously mentioned, a noun (or nominal) clause functions as a noun—a person, place, thing, or idea. This means that it can be the **subject**, **object**, **object of a preposition**, or **predicate nominative** of a sentence.

Subject:

A **subject** is the person, place, thing, or idea that the sentence is about. Noun clauses can often act as the subject of a sentence.

For example:

How to tie shoelaces is a difficult lesson to teach a four-year-old.

What I learned in school today was enlightening.

Object:

An **object** is what is acted upon by the verb in a sentence. Noun clauses can often act as the object of a sentence.

For example:

She knows *how much money we need*.

I wonder *whose book it is*.

Object of a Preposition:

A noun clause that acts as the **object of a preposition** is a clause that follows a preposition (i.e., to, of, at, in, on, for, among, about, etcetera.)

For example:

The teacher gave an explanation of *how to use nominal clauses*.

The family hasn't decided on *where they are going for vacation*.

Predicate Nominative:

A clause that acts as a **predicate nominative** follows a linking verb, which is a verb that expresses the state of being or condition of a subject. For example, in the sentence “*Samantha is funny*”, the linking verb *is* is followed by the adjective *funny*. Instead of being used to express an action, linking verbs describe the subject.

For example:

Valley College is *where we go to school*.

The decision was *whether we should do our homework now or later*.

Adjective Clauses

An **adjective clause** (also called an adjectival/relative clause) is a dependent clause that acts like an adjective because it provides extra information about the

noun or pronoun it follows. Just like noun clauses, adjective clauses typically begin with one of the aforementioned keywords.

Examples of adjective clauses:

who was smiling

that he dislikes

where you live

In a complete sentence, these clauses modify or provide extra information about a noun:

Amy, *who was smiling*, said hello. (Modifies “Amy”)

John does not want to attend a class *that he dislikes*. (Modifies “class”)

The city *where you live* is beautiful. (Modifies “city”)

Adverb Clauses

An **adverb clause** (also called an adverbial clause) gives details about how an action is performed.

Examples of adverb clauses:

while he spoke

because you got an A

if she drives a car

When used in a complete sentence, adverb clauses answer questions such as *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how* an action was performed. It can also express a condition, contrast, purpose, or result of an action.

We listened *while he spoke*.
(Describes *when* we “listened”)

We will celebrate *because you got an A*.
(Describes *why* we “celebrate”)

If she drives a car, she must have a license.
(Expresses a condition in order to “drive”)



Figure 2 Drawing of books

Elliptical Clauses

An **elliptical clause** is a clause in which some words are left out. It can be independent or dependent. The missing words are understood and are therefore unnecessary or superfluous.

Examples of dependent elliptical clauses:

Bella liked the color red; *Evan, green*.
[Bella liked the color red; *Evan {liked the color} green*.]

The comma in the second clause stands in for the words “liked the color”; these words are unnecessary because the meaning is clear from the context given by the first clause.

Commas are not always needed for elliptical clauses:

I am better at English *than science*.
[I am better at English *than {I am at} science*.]

Examples of independent elliptical clauses:

The teacher knew *the students weren't listening*.
[The teacher knew *{that} the students weren't listening*.]

The word “that” is unnecessary in this clause because it is implied; it is understood from the context.

We found a nice restaurant, *located in Los Angeles*.
We found a nice restaurant, *{which was} located in Los Angeles*.

Exercises

1. Underline the noun clause in the following sentences. Does the noun clause represent the subject, object, object of a preposition, or predicate nominative of the sentence?

The question is whether or not you want to buy it. _____

I wonder why she doesn't talk much. _____

She is headed to where she needs to go. _____

What you want to do seems dangerous. _____

The reason we can't go is that we don't have time. _____

2. What words are missing from the elliptical clause?

I'm sure _____ we should study.

He has a cat _____ called Oscar.

Adam wants a jacket; Erin _____ shoes.

The volume of my stereo is louder than _____ yours.

For answers to these exercises, please consult with a Writing Center tutor.

This handout is based on the following sources:

Beason, Larry, and Mark Lester. *A Commonsense Guide to Grammar and Usage*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006. Print.

The Tongue Untied: A Guide to Grammar, Punctuation, and Style. Ed. Kellee Weinhold. 2008. University of Oregon. 20 April 2010. <<http://www.grammaruntied.com>>

Wyatt, C.S. "Clauses and Phrases". *Tameri Guide for Writers*. Ed. S.D. Schnellbach. 12 September 2009. 27 April 2010. <<http://www.tameri.com/edit/phrases.html>>

For further reference, see the following books:

Azar, Betty Schramper. Understanding and Using English Grammar. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents, 1989.

All of the above texts are available in the Writing Center. For more information, please visit our website at <http://www.lavc.edu/writingcenter/>

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