WRITING CENTER
Library and Academic Resource Center (LARC 229)
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Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

Clauses I:
Independent and Dependent Clauses

A **clause** is a group of words that contains both a subject and a verb. A **subject** is typically a **noun**—the person, place, thing, or idea that the sentence is about. A **verb** expresses the action or condition of the subject. A sentence can be comprised of one or many clauses, and there are two simple types of clauses: **independent** and **dependent**. In this handout, we will review these simple clauses and how to properly form complete sentences with them. (For more complex uses of clauses, see the Writing Center handouts "Clauses II" and "Clauses III.")

Independent Clauses

An **independent clause** (also called a **main clause**) can stand alone as a complete sentence because its meaning is complete. It must contain at least one **subject** and one <u>verb</u>, such as in the sentence: "The **ice** <u>melted</u>."

Examples of independent clauses:

The cat climbed the tree.

The president lives in Washington, D.C.

The Writing Center is open.

Combining Independent Clauses

To combine two independent clauses into one sentence, use a **comma and a coordinating conjunction**, a **subordinating conjunction**, a **semicolon**,

or a **semicolon and a transition**. (For more information, see the Writing Center handouts "Run-on Sentences", "Punctuation", "The Comma", "Semicolons", and "Transitions."

Comma and a coordinating conjunction:

The **coordinating conjunctions** are words such as **for, and, nor, but, or, yet,** and **so**. When using them to connect two or more independent clauses together, a comma is always used. The coordinating conjunctions can be easily remembered with the acronym **F.A.N.B.O.Y.S**.

For example:

The cat climbed the tree**, but** he could not get down.

Lucie looked around the house, **and** she even searched the backyard**.**

The school received a large donation, **so** it could begin reopening classes.

Subordinating conjunction:

Subordinating conjunctions are words such as *before, because, unless, after,* etcetera. When used in the middle of a sentence to connect two independent clauses, a comma is typically not needed. (For more information about **subordinating conjunctions**, please refer to the next section of this handout.)

For example:

Robert ran away **because** John yelled at him.

My mom won't lend me money **unless** I bring up my GPA.

The air in California was cleaner **before** the era of industrialization.

Semicolon*:*
A **semicolon** is used to connect two independent clauses that are closely related in idea.

For example:

The president lives in Washington, D.C.**;** he travels around the country frequently.

Happiness cannot be experienced alone**;** it is only real when shared.

Call me tomorrow morning**;** I will have an answer for you by then.

<u>Semicolon and a transition:</u>
A **semicolon** can also connect two independent clauses if one contains a transition with a comma. **Transitions** are words or phrases such as *however, therefore, nevertheless, meanwhile,* etcetera.

For example:

The Writing Center is open**; however**, all of the tutors are busy.

Jessica went to the party**; nevertheless,** her enemy went as well.

The store is closed due to the holiday break**; therefore,** I cannot buy that coat.

<u>Dependent Clauses</u>

A **dependent clause** (also called a **subordinate clause**) is a group of words that contains a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought. Therefore, a dependent clause cannot be a complete sentence on its own. Typically, a dependent clause is made dependent due to certain words or phrases that modify the sentence to be incomplete. These words or phrases include the **subordinating conjunctions**.

Some common subordinating conjunctions are: **after, although, as, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, in order, to, since, though, unless, until, whatever, when, whenever, whether,** and **while.**

Examples of dependent clauses:

When *Jim studied for his chemistry quiz . . .*

While *I was out walking…*

After *the city was built…*

All of these clauses contain a subject and a verb, but the addition of a **subordinating conjunction** modifies these clauses to be dependent and incomplete on their own. What happened *when* Jim studied? What happened

while I was out walking? What happened *after* the city was built? To make these clauses into complete sentences, a comma and an independent clause must be added.

When *Jim studied for his chemistry quiz,* he realized that he was in trouble.

While *I was out walking,* John was out running.

After *the city was built,* tourism flourished.

NOTE! These clauses can be reversed to create a complete sentence as well. In that case, the independent clause would come before the dependent clause, and the comma would no longer be necessary.

Jim realized that he was in trouble **when** *he studied for his chemistry quiz.*

John was out running **while** *I was out walking.*

Tourism flourished **after** *the city was built.*

For more information about other forms of dependent clauses (such as noun, adverb, and adjective clauses) please refer to the Writing Center handout "Clauses II." For information about restrictive and nonrestrictive dependent clauses, please refer to the Writing Center handout "Clauses III."

Exercises

1. Are the following clauses independent (I) or dependent (D)?

The dog ran across the street.	I	D
Who stayed at home today.	I	D
Wherever I go, I feel happy.	I	D
That she knew the answer.	I	D
Where the plants are growing.	I	D
How often do you go?	I	D

2. Underline the dependent clauses in the following sentences.

Although it is raining, we will go out.

I liked to dance when I was a child.

We went to the beach because the weather was fantastic.

In order to be a good tutor, I must be able to write handouts.

The kitchen was renovated before the family moved in to the house.

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.

Berry, Chris, and Allen Brizee. "Identifying Independent and Dependent Clauses."*Purdue OWL: Purdue Online Writing Lab*. Purdue OWL, 07 Apr. 2010. Web. 09 Jan. 2013.

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. Schnelbach. 12 September 2009. 27 April 2010. <http://www.tameri.com/edit/phrases.html>

For further reference, see the following books:
Azar, Betty Schrampfer. *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/   Last Revised: 7/19/18