

## Phrases and Clauses

I. A **phrase** is a collection of words that may have nouns or verbals, but it does not have a subject doing a verb. The following are examples of phrases:

- leaving behind the dog
- smashing into a fence
- before the first test
- after the devastation
- between ignorance and intelligence
- broken into thousands of pieces
- because of her glittering smile

In these examples above, you will find **nouns** (dog, fence, test, devastation, ignorance, intelligence, thousands, pieces). You also have some **verbals** (leaving, smashing), but in no case is the noun functioning as a subject doing a predicate verb. They are all phrases.

II. A **clause** is a collection of words that has a subject that is actively doing a verb. The following are examples of clauses:

- since she laughs at diffident men
- I despise individuals of low character
- when the saints go marching in
- Obediah Simpson is uglier than a rabid raccoon
- because she smiled at him.

In the examples above, we find either a noun or a pronoun that is a **subject** (bold-print) attached to a predicate verb (underlined) in each case:

- since **she** laughs at diffident men
- **I** despise individuals of low character
- when the **saints** go marching in
- **Obediah Simpson** is uglier than a rabid raccoon
- because **she** smiled at him

III. If the clause could stand by itself, and form a complete sentence with punctuation, we call the clause an **independent clause**. The following are independent clauses:

- **I** despise individuals of low character
- **Obediah Simpson** is uglier than a rabid raccoon

We could easily turn independent clauses into complete sentences by adding appropriate punctuation marks. We might say, "I despise individuals of low character." Or we might write, "Obediah Simpson is uglier than a rabid raccoon!" We call them

*independent* because these types of clauses can stand *independently* by themselves, without any extra words attached, and be complete sentences.

- **IV. Dependent clauses** have a subject doing a verb, but they have a subordinate conjunction placed in front of the clause. That subordinate conjunction means that the clause can't stand independently by itself and become a complete sentence. Instead, the dependent clause is *dependent* upon another clause--it can't make a complete sentence by itself, even though it has a subject doing a verb.

#### Common Subordinating Conjunctions/Dependant Words

after		because
who, whose, whom		what, whatever
before	since	until
when	that	if
while	whether...or not	unless
as	although	even though
as if	which	so that

Here are some examples of dependent clauses:

- since **she** laughs at diffident men
- when the **saints** go marching in
- because **she** smiled at him

These clauses simply do not form complete thoughts or sentences by themselves. Those subordinate conjunctions--since, when, and because, cause the listener to expect the speaker to add some extra material. The thought is incomplete. If you walked up to a friend in the dorms and said, "since she laughs at diffident men," and then walked away without adding an independent clause, the friend would be completely baffled.

It's important to understand the difference between phrases, dependent clauses, and independent clauses because many punctuation marks--such as commas, semicolons, and colons, require one or the other.

## Exercises

**Directions:** In the space before each group of words, mark **P** if it is a phrase, **D** if it is a dependent clause and **I** if it is an independent clause.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Over my head
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Because I was afraid
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I didn't get very much sleep
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. That night
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I knew what happened
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. So that I could get some rest
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I heard the cat's meow
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Sitting by the broken plate licking the crumbs
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. When I finally got up
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I got so tired
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Even though I counted sheep
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Ear plugs would be a good investment
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. I never realized how losing sleep affected me
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. The next day
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. When I got to work
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. I forgot to lock the door of my car
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Walking into the parking garage
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Did you ever get a strange feeling that someone was around you
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. On the back of my neck
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. All because I hadn't had enough sleep

**Using a variety of sentence types can make your writing flow better. Here**

**Simple Sentence:** One subject-verb relationship.

- ✓ We talked to the supervisor this morning.

Simple sentences can contain many phrases and be very long.

- ✓ Yesterday afternoon at 3:00, your dog, tired of being cooped up all day, **dug** his way out of your yard and into mine.

Simple sentences can have more than one subject as long as they share the same verb:

- ✓ My sister and your brother **have been dating** secretly for weeks.

Simple sentences can have more than one verb as long as the verbs share the same subject:

- ✓ He **listened** to the radio all morning and **forgot** to study for his test.

**Compound Sentence:** Two or more separate INDEPENDENT CLAUSES connected with a comma AND coordinating (FANBOYS) conjunction or a semicolon (with or without a transitional expression):

, for , and , nor , but , or , yet , so

; moreover, ; thus, ; for example,  
; consequently, ; also, ; as a result,  
; however, ; for instance, ; besides,  
; furthermore, ; nevertheless, ; then,

- ✓ We **went** to the movies last night, and we **stopped** for coffee afterward.
- ✓ Jack **wrote** his essay last night; however, he **forgot** to print it out.

**Complex Sentence:** One INDEPENDENT CLAUSE connected to *at least one* DEPENDENT CLAUSE:

- ✓ Although I was invited to the party, I didn't want to go.
- ✓ We invited the neighbor to the party even though we don't like him.

**Compound-Complex Sentence:** Two or more INDEPENDENT CLAUSES and *at least one* DEPENDENT CLAUSE:

- ✓ When we **heard** a crash outside, I **ran** to the window and Joe **called** 911.

**Exercises:** Identify the following as **S**=Simple, **Com**=Compound, **CX**=Complex, or **CC**=Compound-Complex

1. The summer has been extremely hot, but I think it's getting cooler now.
2. Because my car has no air conditioning, I've been taking the bus.
3. When winter comes, we'll all be complaining about the cold, and with my luck, my heater will break.
4. I would really love to buy a new car, maybe a Hybrid.
5. In the next five years, I will have enough money to pay off my debt.
6. Fred was concerned about his daughter's cough; however, it turned out to be nothing serious.
7. Her alarm didn't go off this morning because she set it for P.M. instead of A.M.