

SENTENCE SENSE

PART I: Phrases and Clauses

A **subject** is the thing or idea or person that the clause is “about.”

A **predicate** is the part of the clause that describes action or state of being (is, am, are, etc.). All predicates are verbs, but not all verbs are predicates. For purposes of these exercises, I will be using the term “**verb**” to encompass all actions or states of being.

A **phrase** is a group of words that may contain a subject or a verb, but it never contains both.

A **clause** is a group of words that contains both a subject and a verb.

A **sentence** is a group of words that contain both a subject and a verb and states a complete idea.

In the following examples, the **subject** is underlined once, and the **verb** is underlined twice:

The party lasted all night.

After I returned from the library

My mother locked me in the bathroom.

I could have starved in there.

Each of these groups of words is a clause because each contains both a subject and a predicate (verb). Some clauses are full sentences, but others are not. A phrase can never be a full sentence by itself because it never contains both a subject and a verb.

PART II: Types of Clauses

There are basically two types of clauses: independent and dependent.

Remember: a clause must contain both a subject and a verb.

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE: an independent clause expresses a complete idea/complete thought and may stand alone as a sentence.

Ex. Victor Frankenstein hoped to better man’s lot.

A walk in the woods can be romantic.

The pleasant smell of sweat socks filtered through the air.

DEPENDENT CLAUSE: a dependent clause (or subordinate clause) has a subject and a verb, but it is not a complete thought and therefore cannot stand alone as a sentence.

Note: there are three types of dependent (subordinate) clauses:

- **Adverbial clause**
- **Adjective clause** (or relative clause)
- **Noun clause**

Identification of these different clauses depends upon how they function in sentences.

Adverbial Clause: an adverbial clause modifies any word an adverb can modify. It describes a verb, adjective or another adverb. It answers the questions when, where, why, how, in what manner and under what condition.

Ex. When Heidi wore her new halter top, her shoulders got burned.

Subordinating Conjunctions: an adverbial clause begins with a subordinating conjunction:

after	how	that
although	if	though
as	in case	to the extent
as if	in order that	unless
as long as	in as much as	until
as much as	insofar as	when
as soon as	once	whenever
assuming that	provided	whether
as though	provided that	whether or not
because	since	where
before	so that	wherever
even though	than	while

Adjective/Relative Clause: an adjective/relative clause modifies a noun or pronoun. It does what an adjective can do. It answers the questions which one or what kind.

Ex. The girl who won the prize is my cousin.

Relative Pronouns: an adjective/relative clause begins with a relative pronoun:

who	which	where
when	that	
whom	whose	

Noun Clauses: a noun clause functions as a noun. It can be used wherever a noun can be used.

Ex. Whoever wants a ride to the store should go to the car.

Relative Pronouns/Subordinating Conjunctions: a noun clause can begin with a relative pronoun or with one of the following introductory words.

whoever
whatever
what
whomever

how
when
if
whichever

whether
where

Note: The following illustrates the possible uses of noun clauses.

Subject: Whoever works during the lunch break can leave early.

Direct object: You will type whatever she needs.

Indirect Object: She gave whoever attended the demonstration free samples of her work.

Object of a preposition: I will shop at whatever store you wish.

Predicate nominative: A long rest is what the doctor ordered.

Appositive: My sister's comments, what she said in the elevator, made everyone laugh.

PART III: Types of Sentences

There are basically three types of sentences: **simple**, **compound**, and **complex**. The system of classification is based on the number and types of clauses making up each sentence.

SIMPLE SENTENCE: a simple sentence contains only one independent clause.

Ex. My grandfather has false teeth.

I am going home.

Wanda ran successfully for class president.

Note: each of the above sentences has a single subject and a simple predicate, but a simple sentence may have a compound subject and a compound predicate.

Compound Subject:

Ex: Bob and Rich went to a restaurant.

Compound Predicate:

Ex: They ate and drank for hours.

Compound Subject and Predicate:

Ex: Bob and Rich went to a restaurant and ate and drank for two hours.

COMPOUND SENTENCE: a compound sentence contains two or more independent clauses. Each independent clause by itself is a simple sentence.

Note: a **compound sentence** is used to express two related ideas that are considered to be equally important. Consider the following independent clause:

Frank has a strange recipe for pizza.

+

He adds peanut butter to the anchovies.

By combining the two independent clauses/simple sentences into a compound sentence, the writer clarifies the relationship between the ideas.

Punctuating the compound sentence: there are three ways to punctuate the two clauses to form a compound sentence.

Coordinating conjunctions: the clauses of a compound sentence can be connected by using a comma and one of the following coordinating conjunctions:

, and , or , but , no , yet , for , so (= therefore)

Ex: Frank has a strange recipe for pizza, for he adds peanut butter to the anchovies.

Note: the conjunction has made clear the relationship between the two statements. There are several coordinating conjunctions to choose from to enable you to show different relationships between your clauses. In the case, the word “for” shows why Frank’s recipe is strange.

Consider the meaning implied by the conjunction in each of the following examples.

Ex: Sue came home for lunch, so John decided to cook for her.

My sister is leaving for college soon, and I am getting her room.

Jason loves Lisa, but Lisa loves Eric.

Semicolon: the clauses of a compound sentence may be connected by using a semicolon alone.

Ex: Frank has a strange recipe for pizza; he adds peanut butter to the anchovies.

My sister is leaving for college soon; I am getting her room.

Jason loves Lisa; but Lisa loves Eric.

Note: When a semicolon is used to connect independent clauses, a coordinating conjunction is not used.

Semicolon and Conjunctive Adverb: the clauses of a compound sentence can be connected by using a semicolon followed by a conjunctive adverb and a comma.

Ex: Frank has a strange recipe for pizza; indeed, he adds peanut butter to the anchovies.

Sue came home for lunch; therefore, John decided to cook for her.

My sister is leaving for college soon; consequently, I am getting her room.

Jason loves Lisa; however, Lisa loves Eric.

The following words are common conjunctive adverbs:

; accordingly,	; indeed,
; also,	; moreover,
; besides,	; otherwise,
; consequently,	; nonetheless,
; however,	; therefore,
; nevertheless,	; thus,

COMPLEX SENTENCE: a complex sentence contains at least one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

Punctuating the complex sentence: punctuation will depend on the type of dependent clause in the sentence.

Complex sentences containing an adverbial clause: punctuation depends on the placement of the clause. When the adverbial (dependent) clause comes first, it is followed by a comma. When the independent clause comes first, a comma is unnecessary and is incorrect.

Isadora Duncan rule: Here is a trick to help you remember how to punctuate this type of sentence. Isadora Duncan was a famous dancer and a fairly notorious lady. Her initials correspond to **Independent (Isadora)** and **Dependent (Duncan)**. If she were signing her autograph, **Isadora Duncan**, she would not separate the two parts of her name with a comma. If she were filling out a form in directory style, however, she would separate the two parts of her name with a comma, like this: **Duncan, Isadora**.

Thus, when punctuating a complex sentence which contains an adverbial dependent clause, if the independent clause precedes the dependent clause, (Isadora Duncan), a comma is unnecessary between them and is therefore incorrect. If the dependent clause precedes the independent clause (Duncan, Isadora), the comma is required between the two clauses.

(Independent/Isadora) (Dependent/Duncan)
Ex: We should sing “Happy Birthday” before you open your gifts.
(no comma)

(Dependent/Duncan) (Independent/Isadora)
Before you open your gifts, we should sing “Happy Birthday”.
(comma)

Ex: While we wait for Steve to arrive, we can plan our route. D, I (dependent, Independent)

Complex sentence containing restrictive and non-restrictive adjective/relative clauses: when an adjective (relative) clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence – that is, if the meaning of the sentence would change if the clause were left out – it is called a restrictive (or necessary) adjective clause. It must not be separated from the rest of the sentence by commas.

Ex: People who are selfish do not make good friends.

Students who skip classes should be expelled.

Note: In these examples, the adjective clause restricts the subject to a group within the larger category. Not all people or students are meant in each of the examples. That is why the clauses are called restrictive or necessary.

Note: Placing commas at either end of a clause or phrase indicates that the information could be left out of the sentence without altering its meaning.

Note: When the information in the adjective clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, and the meaning would not change if the clause were omitted, place commas at each end of the relative clause. This type of adjective clause is called non-restrictive or unnecessary.

Ex: Cats, which some people find aloof, can actually be affectionate pets.

COMPOUND-COMPLEX SENTENCE: A sentence can be both compound and complex; that is, it can have two or more independent clauses as well as dependent clauses. To punctuate these longer sentences, consider each pair of clauses as a unit and punctuate them as if they were the entire sentence. When you finish with one pair, take the second clause from that pair and think of it as the first clause in a pairing with the clause that follows it.

Ex: While I was searching for my lost glove, I found my missing boots, and I also found my brother's missing library book.