

Clauses: Building Blocks for Sentences

What is a clause?

A clause is a group of related words containing a subject and a verb.

It is different from a phrase in that a phrase does not include a subject and a verb relationship.

There are many different kinds of clauses. It would be helpful to review some of the grammar vocabulary we use to talk about clauses.

Clauses: Building Blocks for Sentences

Clauses go by many names. Here are some definitions:

1. Independent: A clause that can stand by itself and still make sense. An independent clause could be its own sentence, but is often part of a larger structure, combined with other independent clauses and with dependent clauses. Independent clauses are sometimes called essential or restrictive clauses.

2. Dependent: A clause that cannot stand by itself. It depends on something else, an independent clause, for its meaning. A dependent clause trying to stand by itself would be a sentence fragment. Dependent clauses are sometimes called subordinate, nonessential, or nonrestrictive clauses. We will review the different kinds of dependent clauses.

Clauses: Building Blocks for Sentences

And here are some examples of independent clauses

1. Independent clauses:

- **Glaciers often leave behind holes in the ground.**
- **These holes are called kettles, and they look just like scooped-out pots.**
- **Glaciers also leave behind enormous deposits of glacial “garbage”; these deposits are called *morains*.**
- **Kettle holes result when a large block of ice is left behind the glacier and then melts away, leaving a large depression.**

This last sentence deserves further attention

Clauses: Building Blocks for Sentences

Notice that this sentence consists of a very brief independent clause followed by a long and complex dependent clause.

• **Kettle holes result** when a large block of ice is left behind the glacier and then melts away, leaving a large depression.

The dependent clause begins with what is called a subordinating conjunction. This causes the clause to be dependent upon the rest of the sentence for its meaning; it cannot stand by itself.

More on dependent clauses in a moment. . . .

Clauses: Building Blocks for Sentences

Independent clauses can be connected in a variety of ways:

1. By a comma and little conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, yet, and sometimes so*).
2. By a semicolon, by itself.
3. By a semicolon accompanied by a conjunctive adverb (such as *however, moreover, nevertheless, as a result, consequently, etc.*).
4. And, of course, independent clauses are often not connected by punctuation at all but are separated by a period.

Clauses: Building Blocks for Sentences

Dependent clauses can be identified and classified according to their role in the sentence.

Noun clauses do anything that a noun can do. They can be subjects, objects, and objects of prepositions.

- What Turveydrop has forgotten about American politics could fill entire libraries.
- President Johnson finally revealed what he had in mind for his congressional leaders.
- Sheila Thistlethwaite has written a marvelous book **about** how American politics and economic processes often run counter to common sense.

Clauses: Building Blocks for Sentences

Dependent clauses can be identified and classified according to their role in the sentence.

ADVERB CLAUSES tend to tell us something about the sentence's main verb: when, why, under what conditions.

- After Jubal Early invaded the outskirts of Washington, Congressional leaders took the southern threat more seriously.
- Lincoln insisted on attending the theater that night because it was important to demonstrate domestic tranquility.

Notice how the dependent clauses begin with “dependent words,” words that subordinate what follows to the rest of the sentence.

These words are also called subordinating conjunctions.

Clauses: Building Blocks for Sentences

Dependent clauses can be identified and classified according to their role in the sentence.

ADJECTIVE CLAUSES modify nouns or pronouns in the rest of the sentence..

- The Internet, which started out as a means for military and academic types to share documents, has become a household necessity.
- Tim Berners-Lee, who developed the World Wide Web, could never have foreseen the popularity of his invention.
- The graphical user interface (GUI) that we all take for granted nowadays is actually a late development in the World Wide Web.

Notice, now, how the subject is often separated from its verb by information represented by the dependent clause.

Clauses: Building Blocks for Sentences

Sometimes an adjective clause has no subject other than the relative pronoun that introduces the clauses.

The Internet was started in 1969 under a contract let by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) which connected four major computers at universities in the southwestern US (UCLA, Stanford Research Institute, UCSB, and the University of Utah).

Such clauses — all beginning with “which,” “that,” or a form of “who” — are also known as RELATIVE CLAUSES. The relative pronoun serves as the subject of the dependent clause and relates to some word or idea in the independent clause.

Clauses: Building Blocks for Sentences

Understanding CLAUSES and how they are connected within the larger structure of your sentence will help you avoid

~~Sentence Fragments~~

and

~~Run-on Sentences~~

and make it possible for you to punctuate your sentences properly and write confidently with a variety of sentence structures.