

Vocabulary Building

Clause – A group of words that has both a subject and verb.

Dependent Clause – A clause that cannot stand on its own because it is not a complete thought. It needs more information to be a complete sentence and always has to be attached to an independent clause.

Independent Clause – A clause that can stand as its own sentence. It is a complete thought with a subject and a verb.

Subject – The subject of a sentence is the person, place, thing, or idea that is doing or being something. Who or what is a sentence about? Who or what “has” the verb? Who or what is the verb in the sentence referring to?

Verb – A word that represents an action or a state of being.

Subordinating Conjunction – A type of word that “subordinates” a clause, or makes it so the clause cannot stand on its own without more information.

Are there more unfamiliar words?

Look up words you don’t know on the Merriam-Webster Learner’s Dictionary at www.learnersdictionary.com.

Want Some More Practice?

There are staff in the Learning Center who would love to help you with your writing!

The College Skills Zone

The College Skills Zone is a great place to engage in conversations that help you understand concepts, especially some basic grammar concepts, and then practice those skills. The College Skills Zone is a place where you can just drop in anytime during open hours.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center assistants are trained to help you with any aspect of the writing process, from understanding an assignment, to brainstorming, to revising your essays. You can drop in during open hours or make a 30-minute appointment for a specific time.

English Language Learner Specialist

A specialist for English Language Learners, Sarah Mosser, is available in the Learning Center during certain hours for drop-in or appointments. Because her schedule varies, it is best to make appointments. .

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Linn-Benton
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
WRITING CENTER

Punctuation

Dependent Clauses



Go-To Guides

Go-To Guides are designed to help in all areas of the writing process.

A Brief Explanation

A **dependent clause** acts a lot like the name sounds. It's a clause (something that has both a subject and a verb) that cannot stand on its own. It isn't a complete thought and needs more information.

Dependent clauses are not complete sentences because they begin with a subordinating conjunction (basically a big term for a word that makes the clause dependent). Let's look at some examples and then take it from there:

Example: When we get back from the movies.

After we eat dinner.

Even though he had already left.

These clauses leave us hanging, often asking, "Okay... then what?" We don't have a complete thought.

To make sense, a dependent clause needs to be attached to an independent clause. An independent clause has both a subject and a verb and can stand on its own as a complete sentence. In the following examples, the dependent clause is underlined, and the independent clause is in bold.

Examples:

1. When we get back from the movies, **we can play a board game.**
2. After we eat dinner, **we'll all study and get our homework done.**
3. **I looked for Sean in the Learning Center** even though he had already left.

Can you guess what the subordinating conjunctions are in the examples? What word makes it so that the clause cannot stand alone? In the above examples, they are *when*, *after*, and *even though*, but there are many subordinating conjunctions.

Some Common Subordinating Conjunctions:

After, although, as, because, before, even if, even though, if, since, so that, though, unless, until, when, whether, while.

Connecting Clauses

So, what exactly are the rules for combining a dependent clause with an independent clause? It's actually quite simple.

1. If the dependent clause is at the beginning of the sentence, a comma needs to separate it from the independent clause.
2. If the independent clause comes first, no comma is needed to separate the clauses.

Examples

NOTE: A short sentence that is not very descriptive is not necessarily a dependent clause. Dependent clauses, by definition, start with a subordinating conjunction, such as *when*, *if*, *although*, *because*, *after*, *before*, etc.

For example: The sentence "We left." is an independent clause. It is a complete sentence because it has both a subject (we) and a verb (left), and therefore, even though it does not have a lot of information, it can stand alone as a complete thought.

The clause "Because we left the house yesterday afternoon with some friends" has a lot more information but is not a complete thought because it starts with a subordinating conjunction (because) and never has the independent clause. Therefore, even though this is longer and more detailed, it cannot stand alone.

1. **Incorrect:** We were all going to stay up late and study. Because we had an exam the next day.

Correct: We were all going to stay up late and study because we had an exam the next day.

Why is the first example incorrect?

2. **Incorrect:** Even though we were all tired. We stayed as late as we could to prepare for the test.

Correct: Even though we were all tired, we stayed as late as we could to prepare for the test.

Why is the first example incorrect?

3. **Incorrect:** Since we studied so hard before the test we all got really great grades.

Correct: Since we studied so hard before the test, we all got really great grades.

Why is the first example incorrect?

Try it Out!

True or False?

1. T F A dependent clause must be attached to an independent clause.
2. T F Dependent clauses make sense on their own.
3. T F A dependent clause has a subordinating conjunction, a subject, and a verb.
4. T F When a dependent clause comes before the independent clause, no comma is needed to separate them.
5. T F When the independent clause comes before the dependent clause, no comma is needed to separate them.

Answers: 1. T 2. F 3. T 4. F 5. T

Practice

1. Label the following clauses with an I for "Independent Clause" or a D for "Dependent Clause."

- A. _____ If we all work together.
- B. _____ We could all finish in a couple of hours.
- C. _____ You shouldn't pull an all-nighter studying.
- D. _____ Even though the test is at 8:00 tomorrow morning.
- E. _____ Let's get some rest and meet for a last minute session half an hour before the test.

Answers: A. D B. I C. I D. D E. I

2. Decide if the sentence needs a comma or not. If a comma is necessary, place the comma where it belongs.

- A. If we all work together we could all finish in a couple of hours.
- B. You shouldn't pull an all-nighter studying even though the test is at 8:00 tomorrow morning.
- C. Let's get some rest and meet for a last minute session half an hour before the test.
- D. After the test we should get lunch together and take a break.
- E. Maybe tonight we can relax and play some games whether we ace the test or not.

3. Write your own! Write 3 sentences with both an independent and dependent clause. Be sure to get the commas in the right places!
