

CLAUSES AND PHRASES

If students are to distinguish between sentences and fragments, it is important that they become familiar with the various types of clauses and phrases in the English language. In this context, there are several points to remember:

1. Written English demands that word groups set off by periods be complete sentences;
2. Every complete sentence must have at least one independent clause;
3. Dependent clauses and phrases are fragments because they are parts of sentences and cannot stand by themselves.

I. THE CLAUSE

A clause is a group of related words which has a subject and a complete verb.

An independent clause (a sentence expresses a complete thought and can, therefore, stand on its own.

A dependent clause (also known as a subordinate clause) is an incomplete thought which depends upon an independent clause to complete its meaning.

Independent Clauses: The actress bought a very expensive dress.
The room was absolutely quiet.
The book was a best seller.
A doctrine of isolationism was best for the country.

Dependent Clauses: Although the actress bought a very expensive dress
After the room became absolutely quiet
Which was a best seller
What was best for the country

Dependent clauses may be noun, adjective, or adverb clauses.

A. A noun clause is a clause used as a noun within a sentence. A noun clause begins with a word like whoever, whichever, whatever, who, that, what, how, why, when, or where.

1. Subject: Whatever you say is good enough for me.
What Sylvia did amazed me.
2. Direct Object: We believed that Harry's story was true.
Many voters will support whoever promises lower taxes.

3. Indirect Object: He gave whoever was there a free sample.
4. Predicate Noun: You can be whatever you want.
My only hope was that we might be rescued.
5. Object of Preposition: We were prepared for what he proposed.
A prize will be given to whoever solves the riddle.

B. An adjective clause, also called a relative clause, begins with a relative pronoun (which, that, who, whose, whom) and normally modifies the noun or pronoun which precedes it.

1. She was the only woman whom he loved.
2. He who is most fortunate dies young.
3. The man whom he worked for committed suicide.
4. Students whose parents read are readers too.
5. The house which Jack built fell down.

C. An adverb clause begins with one of the subordinating conjunctions (after, until, because, though, while, if, so, that, than, once, as soon as, etc.) and most often modifies the verb in the independent clause. Adverb clauses tell when, where, why, how, to what extent, and under what conditions.

1. He kissed her when he could. (when)
2. He kissed her where he could. (where)
3. He kissed her because he could. (why)
4. He kissed her as only he could. (how)
5. He kissed her as much as he could. (to what extent)
6. He kissed her if he could. (under what conditions)

II. PHRASES

A phrase is a group of related words that functions as a unit but that does not have a subject and a complete verb.

A. A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition (to, under, of, by, in, beside, etc.) and ends with a noun or pronoun which is called the object of the preposition.

1. If the prepositional phrase modifies a noun or pronoun, it is an adjective phrase.

The rain on the roof makes me sleepy.
Helen is the woman with red hair.
The student near the window is cheating.
His day at the racetrack made him rich.

2. If the prepositional phrase modifies a verb, an adjective, or an adverb, it is an adverb phrase.

The rain fell on the roof. (where)
He won by a huge margin. (how)
The snow fell during the night. (when)
He gambled for the thrill. (why)

- B. An appositive phrase is a noun or pronoun (with its modifiers) that is placed next to and that renames another noun or pronoun. The appositive phrase is usually set off with commas.

1. Buster Crabbe, a champion swimmer, became a movie star.
2. Poison gas, a weapon of ghastly effect, was first used in World War I.

- C. There are three types of verbal phrases: infinitive, gerund, and participial.

1. The infinitive phrase is introduced by the word to followed by a verb: to save, to go, to marry, to run, to bathe, to discover, to speculate, etc. The infinitive phrase may be used as an adjective modifying a noun or pronoun.

He has money to burn.
Man's desire to explore has already taken him to the moon.
The will to live brought him through the operation.

The infinitive phrase may be used as an adverb modifying a verb.

They studied to learn.
The timekeeper fired his gun to start the race.
A starving prisoner will do almost anything to survive.

The infinitive phrase may be used as a noun.

To save is difficult. (subject)
She wanted to go. (direct object)
The young prince's ambition was to be king. (predicate noun)

2. The participial phrase is used as an adjective modifying a noun or pronoun. It may derive from the present participle (the -ing form of the verb) or from the past participle (-d, -ed, -t, -en, etc.).

Present Participle:

Leaving a trail of cookie crumbs, Jenny slowly climbed the stairs.
That star shining in the west is really a planet.
The man working in the yard is her husband.
Running to catch the bus, Sara tripped and fell.

Past Participle:

The rabbit, chased by the hounds, made its way into the woods.
Given an alternative, the soldier would have left the battle.
Built as an adult amusement park, Tivoli stands in the center of Copenhagen.
Gunned down in cold blood, Pete Thorpe was buried at Boot Hill.

3. The gerund phrase consists of the -ing form of the verb and its modifiers.

Subject: Smoking cigarettes can damage the lungs.
Direct Object: He loves reading detective stories.
Indirect Object: He gave dieting a try.
Object of the Preposition: By robbing a score of banks,
Jesse James became notorious.
Predicate Noun: Jack's hobby is collecting stamps.