

Clauses

Grammar is an essential part of writing. While a writer can express their claim or story without perfect grammar, following these writing rules will help ensure your ideas are clearly understood by your readers. This handout goes over one of the building blocks of an English language sentence: clauses.

Clauses

To start off, the defining characteristic of a clause is that it has a **subject** and a **verb**.

A clause is a step below sentences. We often join multiple clauses to make up a sentence. A single clause that can “stand on its own” (or doesn’t need another clause for explanation) can also be a sentence.

Independent Clauses

An independent clause is a clause that expresses a complete thought. It can be considered a complete sentence by itself or be joined with other clauses.

Example: Hannah studied.

In this example, *Hannah* is the subject of the sentence, and *studied* is the verb, so we have a clause. While it’s not very detailed, it is a complete thought and can stand on its own as a complete sentence. For this reason, we’d call “Hannah studied” an independent clause.

Connecting Two Independent Clauses

If you have two independent clauses that are closely related to each other, you can connect them into a single sentence. There are three ways to do this.

1. Coordinating Conjunctions

There are seven coordinating conjunctions: **and**, **but**, **for**, **or**, **nor**, **so**, and **yet**. To use these in connecting two sentences, you would write an independent clause followed by a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and the second independent clause.

Example: Hannah studied, but it was hard to focus.

In this example, the first independent clause is “Hannah studied.” We follow this with a comma and the coordinating conjunction *but*, and then continue with the second independent clause, “it was hard to focus.”

2. Conjunctive Adverbs

Some common conjunctive adverbs include **accordingly**, **also**, **besides**, **consequently**, **finally**, **however**, **indeed**, **instead**, **likewise**, **meanwhile**, **moreover**, **nevertheless**, **next**, **otherwise**, **still**, **therefore**, and **then**. To use these, you would write an independent

clause followed by a semicolon, a conjunctive adverb, a comma and the second independent clause.

Example: She studied in the library for her quiz; however, it was hard to focus because of the noise.

3. Semicolon

To use a semicolon to connect two independent clauses, it is important that the second clause either expands on the first or defines the first. They cannot be connected by a semicolon if they are not related. To use it, you only need to place a semicolon between the two independent clauses.

Example: She couldn't study in the library for her quiz; it was hard to focus because of the noise.

In this example, the second clause expands on the idea that “she couldn’t study in the library” by providing the reason why she couldn’t study.

Subordinate Clauses

A subordinate clause is a clause that does not express a complete thought. This means it cannot be a complete sentence by itself.

Example: When she studied in the library for her quiz

In the example, the clause contains a subject (she) and a verb (studied), but it does not complete a thought. The reader is left asking what happened? What happened *when* she studied in the library??

Subordinate clauses are recognizable by their “marker words”, or subordinating conjunctions. These words are at the beginning of the dependent clause. They include: **after, although, as, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, in order to, since, though, unless, until, whatever, when, whenever, whether, and while.**

Connecting an Independent and Subordinate Clause

A subordinate clause has to be joined by an independent clause that completes the thought in order to create a complete sentence. If the subordinate clause comes first, it should be joined to the independent clause by a comma. If the subordinate clause comes second, there is no need for a comma.

Example with the subordinate clause first: When she studied in the library for her quiz, she saw her friend Mary.

Example with the subordinate clause second: She saw her friend Mary when she studied in the library for her quiz.