

Independent and Dependent Clauses

Definition

A clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb. There are two kinds of clauses:

1. An **independent clause** is a complete thought, a sentence. It has the main subject and verb of a sentence. (It is also called a main clause.)
2. A **dependent clause** is NOT a complete thought and is not a sentence. The dependent clause gives incomplete information. It **must** be linked to an independent clause. (It is also called a subordinate clause.)

Example

When do the students listen? (independent clause)
Sentence — Question

The students listen. (independent clause)
Sentence — Statement

when the teacher talks (dependent clause)
NOT a sentence

The students listen when the teacher talks. (complex sentence with independent clause and dependent clause)

Explanation

There are three types of dependent clauses —

- **Adverb clause** — This type of dependent clause modifies or describes a verb, adjective, or adverb in the independent clause. Adverb clauses are introduced by a subordinate conjunction (a kind of linking word).
For example, **When I am online**, I check my e-mail.
- **Adjective clause** — This type of dependent clause modifies or describes a noun or a pronoun in the independent clause. Relative pronouns (“who”, “whose”, “whom”, “which”, and “that”) introduce adjective clauses.
For example, The Web site **that I visited last week** was very informative.
- **Noun clause** — This type of dependent clause is used as the subject or the direct object of a verb. It is used the same way a noun is used. Noun clauses are introduced by the following words: “who”, “whose”, “whom”, “what”, “where”, “which”, “when”, “why”, “how”, “that”, “if”, and “whether”.

For example, The programmer asked **who wanted to test the new software**.

A dependent clause —

- cannot be written as a complete sentence.
- can be placed at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of an independent clause.
- can use a simplified tense when the independent clause clearly shows the time.
For example, a dependent clause often uses the present tense instead of **will + infinitive** when the independent clause uses the future tense.
- usually does **NOT** omit a repeated subject.
- is followed by a comma when it comes before the independent clause.

Independent and Dependent Clauses

Example Sentences

Example	Explanation
after he won the Web design competition	This is a dependent clause. It is not a complete thought. It is NOT a sentence.
After he won the Web design competition, the businessman advertised for his company. The businessman, after he won the Web design competition, advertised for his company. The businessman advertised for his company after he won the Web design competition.	The dependent clause can be placed — <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ at the beginning of an independent clause.▪ in the middle of an independent clause.▪ at the end of an independent clause.
The students had gone to the library after their class ended .	The verb tense in the dependent clause is often given in a simpler tense than the verb tense in the independent clause.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent clause: past perfect tense Dependent clause: simple past tense
<p>I will call you if I finish my homework early.</p> <p>I will call you when I finish my homework.</p> <p>NOT: I will call you when I will finish my homework.</p>	<p>Use the present tense instead of "will" in the dependent clause when the independent clause clearly shows future.</p> <p>Do NOT use "will" with "when" or other linking words that indicate time.</p>
<p>The student passed the exam because she had studied hard</p> <p>NOT: The student passed the exam because had studied hard.</p>	<p>Do not omit the second subject in the dependent clause.</p>
<p>When the students finished their class, they went to the library.</p>	<p>When the dependent clause comes before the independent clause, use a comma.</p> <p>When _____, _____.</p>
<p>The students went to the library when they finished their class.</p>	<p>When the dependent clause comes after the independent clause, do not use a comma.</p> <p>_____ when _____.</p>

Complex Sentences

Definition

A complex sentence is a sentence that has two parts:

1. a main subject (S) + verb (V) part (called an independent clause) and
2. a second subject (S) + verb (V) part (called a dependent clause).

Example

The new scanner works well because the new scanning software has been improved.

The new scanner works well (independent clause) because **the new scanning software has been improved** (dependent clause).

Explanation

A complex sentence —

- joins an independent clause and one or more dependent clauses together in one sentence.
- has subject and verb agreement.
- has verb tense agreement to show the same time.
- can use different verb tenses to show different times.
- uses a subordinate conjunction to join the clauses together. Subordinate conjunctions are linking words such as “although”, “while”, “if”, “because”.
- can place the dependent clause inside the independent clause.
- has specific punctuation rules, for example, use a comma after a dependent clause.

Adverb Clauses

Definition

An adverb clause is a dependent clause that modifies or describes a verb, adjective, or adverb in the independent clause.

Example

When your spam filter is not set properly, you may receive a lot of spam e-mail.

Explanation

An adverb clause —

- shows the relationship between the independent clause and the dependent clause. For example, an adverb clause can show:
 - time order
 - cause and effect

- contrast
- condition
- is introduced by a subordinate conjunction (a kind of linking word).
- can be placed before or after the independent clause.
- is followed by a comma when the adverb clause is placed **before** the independent clause.
- uses present tense, NOT future tense, when it is showing time order in the future.

Adverb Clauses

Example Sentences

Example	Explanation
As soon as you get to work, please check your e-mail.	Adverb clause to show time order <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First action: get to work ▪ Second action: check your e-mail
The student will go to the library when he finishes the test.	Use present tense (not the future tense) with adverb clauses showing time order in the future.
It was such an interesting class that the students continued the discussion.	Adverb clause to show cause and effect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Action: The students continued the discussion ▪ Cause (reason): It was such an interesting class
Isaac is a programmer, whereas Pat is a developer.	Adverb clause to show contrast <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fact: Isaac is a programmer ▪ Opposite fact: Pat is a developer
If the project is successful, the employees will receive a bonus.	Adverb clause to show condition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Action: Receive a bonus ▪ Condition: If the project is

	<p>successful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meaning: The project is successful + the employees will receive a bonus OR the project will not be successful + the employees will not receive a bonus
<p>The student will go to the language lab when he finishes the test.</p>	<p>There is no comma when the independent clause comes before the adverb clause.</p>
<p>When he finishes the test, the student will go to the language lab.</p>	<p>There is a comma when the adverb clause comes first.</p>