

# MPC English & Study Skills Center

## Clauses

English sentences are written using various combinations of both phrases and clauses. Although both may be used for similar reasons (as subject, adjective, adverb, or object) phrases and clauses have different characteristics.

A clause is a group of words that includes a subject and a verb. There are two main groups of clauses, **independent** and **dependent**.

<b>Independent (or Main) Clause</b>	<b>Dependent (or Subordinating) Clause</b>
This can stand alone and make sense as a complete thought. It can be a sentence by itself or can be combined with other clauses, either dependent or independent.	This cannot be a sentence by itself but must be attached to a main clause. The three types are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adjective (or Relative)</li><li>• Adverb</li><li>• Noun</li></ul>

## Independent Clauses

The independent/main clauses are underlined in the following sentences:

She went to the store. (one independent clause)

Tamika studied English, but Keiko studied Spanish. (two independent clauses)

Before I go to the hospital, I need to pack. (one dependent clause and one independent clause)

The man who lives next door is an escaped convict! (one independent clause with a dependent clause imbedded)

## Dependent Clauses

### ➤ Adjective/Relative Clause

This is a clause that is used as an adjective to describe a noun or pronoun; it must follow the noun or pronoun that it describes. Essentially, an adjective clause is used to put one sentence inside another sentence. These clauses begin with a **relative pronoun** or **relative adverb**, which can be omitted if it is not serving as the subject within the clause.

<b>Relative Pronouns</b>		<b>Relative Adverbs</b>
who	which	when
whom	that	where
whose		why

✂ It is possible to join ideas in a number of ways. One way is just to use a series of simple sentences:

My neighbor works at K-Mart. She is from Germany.

✂ Another way is to use a conjunction (a comma comes before the conjunction):

My neighbor works at K-Mart, **and** she is from Germany.

✂ However, in English it is always better to put descriptions next to the thing described, so the second sentence can go inside of the first. In above pair of **independent** clauses, “neighbor” and “she” refer to the same person. When a sentence is imbedded in another sentence, the second sentence needs a **relative pronoun** to replace the word that describes the same thing in the first sentence. In this case, “she” refers to “neighbor” and needs to be changed to “who.”

My neighbor, **who is from Germany**, works at K-mart.

#### **Further examples:**

Kenji went to the store. The store is in the mall.

Kenji went to the store **that is in the mall**.

The letter arrived late. The girl sent the letter.

The letter **(that) the girl sent** arrived late.

**Note:** The relative pronoun always goes first even though it may have been in another position in the original sentence. Thus, it is correct to say “that the girl sent” rather than “the girl sent that.”

✂ There are a couple of important things to remember:

- Never use “which” or “that” to refer to people—use “who,” “whom,” or “whose.”
- ALWAYS put the adjective/relative clause right after the word it describes or you will end up with a **misplaced modifier**—that is, an adjective clause describing the wrong thing.

✂ Example of a misplaced modifier:

**Incorrect:** I drove by the house last weekend **where I used to live**. (In this case, “where I used to live” follows and describes “weekend,” but that doesn’t make any sense.)

**Correct:** I drove by the house **where I used to live** last weekend. (Now, “where I used to live” follows and describe ‘house,’ “and that makes sense.)

✂ Another example of a misplaced modifier:

**Incorrect:** I found the car at the police station **that had been stolen**. (This suggests that the “police station” was stolen.)

**Correct:** I found the car **that had been stolen** at the police state. (Now, the adjective clause “that had been stolen” follows the word it is describing—“car.”)

✂ There are two types of adjective clauses: **restrictive** and **non-restrictive**:

<b>Restrictive Clause</b>	<b>Non-restrictive Clause</b>
<p>This is necessary for identification—to understand “which one.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not use commas around clause</li> <li>• Do not use “which” as the relative pronoun</li> </ul>	<p>This is extra information, interesting but not necessary to identify.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use commas around the clause to set it apart</li> <li>• Do not use “that” as the relative pronoun (NEVER)</li> </ul>

**Note:** Restrictive clauses are also referred to as “essential” and non-restrictive clauses as “non-essential.”

**Examples of restrictive clauses:**

The man **whom I love** will marry me. (This one man, not the others in the world.)

The dog **that bit me** has rabies. (This particular dog, not dogs that didn’t bite me.)

The town **where I live** is near the beach. (Not towns I don’t live in.)

The girl **who is wearing a red dress** is my daughter. (The other children are wearing different colors, so this is identifying information.)

**Examples of non-restrictive clauses:**

Mrs. Brown, **who is my neighbor**, went to Europe. (A proper name is already considered identified, so the adjective/relative clause is interesting but not necessary to identify.)

The teacher, **whom I like**, is very difficult. (I like a lot of teachers; this isn’t identifying information.)

My mother, **who lives with me**, is 94 years old. (I only have one mother, so “my mother” already identifies her.)

That song, **which was too loud**, was hard to understand. (All of the songs were loud, so this information won’t identify.)

➤ **Adverb Clause**

This is a clause that starts with a **subordinating conjunction** to show a relationship—**time, reason, condition, contrast** or **surprise**—between the dependent (adverb) clause and the independent (main) clause.

<b>Subordinating Conjunctions</b>		
after	if	when
although	since	whenever
as	though	wherever
because	unless	whether
before	until	while

‡ An adverb clause always needs another half to be complete:

When I get up in the morning. . . .  
Because he is tired . . . .  
If you work hard . . . .

‡ When the adverb clause precedes the main clause, it is followed by a comma:

**Before I finish cooking dinner**, I need to go to the store.  
**If you really loved me**, you would wash the dishes.  
**Because it's so late**, Ted is going to bed.

‡ When the adverb clause follows the main clause, no comma is necessary:

I will make the spaghetti **after I get home**.  
Serena will pass the test **if she studies all night**.  
Martin saw the rainbow **as he was driving home**.

British English places a comma before the ending adverb clause, and sometimes writers insert commas to make the reader pause and to emphasize the message of the adverb clause—primarily with *because*, *since*, *although*, *though*, and *even though*.

I will marry you, **because I have no choice!**

Generally, though, commas should not precede ending adverb clauses.

## ➤ Noun Clause

The noun clause, like the adjective clause, usually begins with *that* or a word beginning with *wh*, such as *who*, *whom*, *which*, *whoever*, *whichever*, *how*. These words can be omitted if they are not serving as subjects in a clause.

The noun clause is used as a single idea, and it can be used anywhere a simple noun can be used—usually as a subject or direct object, but it can also be the object of a preposition.

**What I know** is important. (subject)  
**That she is intelligent** remains to be seen. (subject)  
I know **(that) I should go home now**. (direct object)  
I believe **that is the correct answer**. (direct object)  
Give the book to **whoever wants it**. (object of preposition “to”)

## Phrases

Don't confuse clauses with phrases. A phrase is a group of words that go together and create a unit of meaning but do not include a subject and verb.

- In the morning
- Last night
- Working late
- Swinging from the trees

**Note:** A combination such as “dog leash” does not make a phrase because it does not create a unit of meaning—that is, it doesn't make any sense!