

Phrases and Clauses

I. A **phrase** is a collection of words that may have nouns or verbals, but it does not have a subject doing a verb. The following are examples of phrases:

- leaving behind the dog
- smashing into a fence
- before the first test
- after the devastation
- between ignorance and intelligence
- broken into thousands of pieces
- because of her glittering smile

In these examples above, you will find **nouns** (dog, fence, test, devastation, ignorance, intelligence, thousands, pieces). You also have some **verbals** (leaving, smashing), but in no case is the noun functioning as a subject doing a predicate verb. They are all phrases.

II. A **clause** is a collection of words that has a subject that is actively doing a verb. The following are examples of clauses:

- since she laughs at diffident men
- I despise individuals of low character
- when the saints go marching in
- Obediah Simpson is uglier than a rabid raccoon
- because she smiled at him.

In the examples above, we find either a noun or a pronoun that is a **subject** (bold-print) attached to a predicate verb (underlined) in each case:

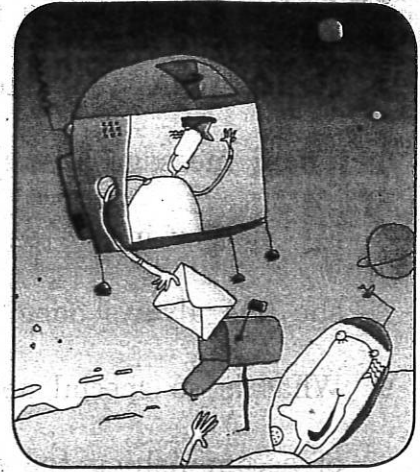
- since **she** laughs at diffident men
- I despise individuals of low character
- when the **saints** go marching in
- **Obediah Simpson** is uglier than a rabid raccoon
- because **she** smiled at him

Clauses

A clause is a group of words containing a subject and a predicate. An **independent clause** presents a complete thought and can stand alone as a sentence. A **dependent clause** does not present a complete thought and cannot stand alone. A dependent clause must be connected to an independent clause. (See page 698.)

A dependent clause begins with a subordinating conjunction—*after, although, because, before, when, while,* and so on—or a relative pronoun—*who, whom, whose, which, that,* and so on. (See 710.1 and 744.2 in *Write Source* for additional examples of both types of words.)

Note: A sentence containing an independent clause and a dependent clause is called a complex sentence. (See page 746 in *Write Source* for more information.)



Examples

Although I don't like writing letters, I love getting them.

(“Although I don't like writing letters” is a dependent clause beginning with a subordinating conjunction. “I love getting them” is an independent clause.)

I really enjoy letters that include funny stories.

(“I really enjoy letters” is an independent clause. “That include funny stories” is a dependent clause beginning with a relative pronoun.)

Directions

Read the following sentences. Underline each independent clause. Put parentheses () around each dependent clause. The first sentence has been done for you. (One sentence has two dependent clauses.)

1. (Although I always appreciate gifts) I find it hard to write formal thank-you letters.
2. It is especially hard when my mother is on my case.
3. Because this is such a big deal with my mother, I'm trying to understand the issues.
4. My mother is someone who is very set in her ways.
5. If only she counted telephone calls and e-mail, I would be off the hook.

6. As soon as I open a gift, I like to call the person and say thank you.
7. Formal thank-you notes sound phony to me, while a phone call or an e-mail message seems much more natural.
8. My mother insists on a handwritten thank-you because that is what she has always done.
9. What is so special about writing by hand when there are other ways of accomplishing the same thing?
10. Why do we have telephones and computers if we aren't allowed to use them for everyday things?
11. If a person has e-mail, I have no trouble getting on the computer and keying in a note of thanks.
12. I enjoy technology that allows me to work quickly and efficiently.
13. Even though my birthday was two weeks ago, I still haven't gotten around to writing my thank-you note to Uncle Bert.
14. If I would send him an e-mail message, I have no idea what would happen with my mom.

Next Step Write a friendly letter or a thank-you note to someone who deserves to hear from you. Actually send the letter, and experience the good feeling you get from corresponding with someone. Turn to *Write Source* for guidelines and models.

Exercises

Directions: In the space before each group of words, mark P if it is a phrase, D if it is a dependent clause and I if it is an independent clause.

- _____ 1. Over my head
- _____ 2. Because I was afraid
- _____ 3. I didn't get very much sleep
- _____ 4. That night
- _____ 5. I knew what happened
- _____ 6. So that I could get some rest
- _____ 7. I heard the cat's meow
- _____ 8. Sitting by the broken plate licking the crumbs
- _____ 9. When I finally got up
- _____ 10. I got so tired
- _____ 11. Even though I counted sheep
- _____ 12. Ear plugs would be a good investment
- _____ 13. I never realized how losing sleep affected me
- _____ 14. The next day
- _____ 15. When I got to work
- _____ 16. I forgot to lock the door of my car
- _____ 17. Walking into the parking garage
- _____ 18. Did you ever get a strange feeling that someone was around you
- _____ 19. On the back of my neck
- _____ 20. All because I hadn't had enough sleep

THE CLAUSE

A **clause** is a group of words containing a verb and its subject. A clause that can stand by itself as a sentence is a **main clause**.

S V S V
ex. He walked down the street. Ken plays in the band.

A clause that cannot stand by itself is a **subordinate clause**.

S V
ex. As I approached the house-(What happened?)
S V
 If you come to my house-(Then what?)

Phrase or Clause? A clause has a subject and a verb. A phrase does not.

ex. Losing my amethyst ring was a blow. (phrase)
 When I lost my ring, I was unhappy. (clause)

Identify Clauses and Phrases. Read each sentence below. If the underlined group of words is a phrase, write P. If it is a clause, write C.

Example: When I recover from the flu, I'll leave on my trip.

C

1. If you have solved that puzzle, here's a harder one. _____
2. Walking toward the old house, Joan met no one. _____
3. The box on the table contains Jack's birthday present. _____
4. Do you know what is in the box? _____
5. We saw the old woman climbing the stairs. _____
6. Nodding to me casually, the principal went into his office. _____
7. When Amy saw her father, she rushed up to him. _____
8. We saw the old woman as she climbed the stairs. _____
9. After listening to the teacher's directions, the class began to take the test. _____
10. This is the record that I sent for. _____
11. Smiling cheerfully, Kim walked down the hall. _____
12. If you can spare the time, let's go to the movie tonight. _____
13. Standing down the hall, Mr. Sims looked neither right nor left. _____
14. When I came home, I found my brother there ahead of me. _____
15. Opening the mail, Mrs. Harris found three bills. _____
16. After they had fought the cold in January, the Millers went south in February. _____
17. If you like Nantucket, you will love Washington Island. _____
18. There goes the ambulance, hurrying to the hospital. _____
19. Be quiet until the buzzer sounds. _____
20. Standing in the rain at the parade, Fred got drenched. _____

