

# THE CLAUSE

## Recognize a clause when you find one.

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Clauses come in four types: **main** (or *independent*), **subordinate** (or *dependent*), **adjective** (or *relative*), and **noun**. Every clause has at least one **subject** and one **verb**. Other characteristics will help you distinguish one type of clause from another.

### MAIN CLAUSE

Every **main clause** will follow this pattern:

**SUBJECT** + **VERB** = **COMPLETE THOUGHT** .

Here are examples:

Lazy students whine.

**Students** = subject; **whine** = verb.

Cola spilled over the glass and splashed onto the counter.

**Cola** = subject; **spilled, splashed** = verbs.

My dog loves pizza crusts.

**Dog** = subject; **loves** = verb.

Remember that every sentence must have at least one main clause. Otherwise, you have a **fragment**, a major error.

### SUBORDINATE CLAUSE

A **subordinate clause** will follow this pattern:

**SUBORDINATE CONJUNCTION** + **SUBJECT** + **VERB** = **INCOMPLETE THOUGHT** .

Here are examples:

Whenever lazy students whine

**Whenever** = subordinate conjunction; **students** = subject; **whine** = verb.

As cola spilled over the glass and splashed onto the counter

**As** = subordinate conjunction; **cola** = subject; **spilled, splashed** = verbs.

Because my dog loves pizza crusts

**Because** = subordinate conjunction; **dog** = subject; **loves** = verb.

Remember that subordinate clauses can never stand alone as complete sentences. To complete the thought, you must attach each subordinate clause to a **main clause**.

These are the patterns:

**MAIN CLAUSE** +  $\emptyset$  + **SUBORDINATE CLAUSE** .

**SUBORDINATE CLAUSE** + , + **MAIN CLAUSE** .

Read these revisions:

**Whenever lazy students whine**, Professor Russell throws chalk erasers at their heads.

Anthony ran for the paper towels **as cola spilled over the glass and splashed onto the counter**.

**Because my dog loves pizza crusts**, he never barks at the deliveryman.

## ADJECTIVE CLAUSE

An **adjective clause** will begin with a **relative pronoun** (such as **who, whom, whose, which, or that**) or a **relative adverb** (**when, where, or why**).

The patterns look like these:

**RELATIVE PRONOUN OR ADVERB** + **SUBJECT** + **VERB** = **INCOMPLETE THOUGHT** .

**RELATIVE PRONOUN AS THE SUBJECT** + **VERB** = **INCOMPLETE THOUGHT**

Here are examples:

Whom Professor Russell hit in the head with a chalk eraser

**Whom** = relative pronoun; **Professor Russell** = subject; **hit** = verb.

Where he chews and drools with great enthusiasm

**Where** = relative adverb; **he** = subject; **chews, drools** = verbs.

That had spilled over the glass and splashed onto the counter

**That** = relative pronoun (as the subject); **had spilled, splashed** = verbs.

Who loves pizza crusts

**Who** = relative pronoun (as the subject); **loves** = verb.

Like subordinate clauses, adjective clauses cannot stand alone as complete sentences. You must connect them to **main clauses** to finish the thought.

Read these revisions:

The lazy students **whom Professor Russell hit in the head with a chalk eraser** soon learned to keep their complaints to themselves.

My dog Floyd, **who loves pizza crusts**, eats them under the kitchen table, **where he chews and drools with great enthusiasm**.

Anthony ran to get paper towels for the cola **that had spilled over the glass and splashed onto the counter**.

Punctuating adjective clauses can be tricky. You must decide if the adjective clause is *essential* or *nonessential* and then use commas accordingly.

**Essential adjective clauses** do not require commas. An adjective clause is essential when you need the information it provides. The clause helps determine *which one of many* the writer means.

Read this example:

A dog **that eats too much pizza** will soon develop pepperoni breath.

**Dog** is nonspecific. To know which dog we are talking about, we must have the information in the adjective clause. Thus, the adjective clause is essential and requires no commas.

If, however, we revise **dog** and choose more specific words instead, the adjective clause becomes **nonessential** and *does* require commas to separate it from the rest of the sentence.

Read this revision:

My dog Floyd, **who eats too much pizza**, has developed pepperoni breath.

## NOUN CLAUSE

Any clause that functions as a **noun** becomes a **noun clause**.

Consider this sentence:

You really do not want to know the **ingredients** in Aunt Nancy's stew.

**Ingredients** = noun.

If we replace the noun **ingredients** with a clause, we have a noun clause:

You really do not want to know **what Aunt Nancy adds to her stew**.

**What Aunt Nancy adds to her stew** = noun clause.

