

THE CLAUSE

Recognize a clause when you find one.

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.

