

# THE MAIN CLAUSE

## Recognize a main clause when you find one.

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A main clause—sometimes called an *independent* clause—must contain a **subject** and a **verb**. Together, this pair expresses a complete thought.

Read these examples:

Diane kicked the soda machine.

**Diane** = subject; **kicked** = verb.

A giant spider has spun its web behind the shampoo bottle in Neil's bathroom.

**Spider** = subject; **has spun** = verb.

Sima and Michele are skipping their chemistry class to sit by the lake.

**Sima, Michele** = subjects; **are skipping** = verb.

## A main clause makes a sentence complete.

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You must have at least one main clause in every **sentence**. A main clause is *the* essential component. Without a main clause, a group of words is a **fragment**, a major error in writing.

A sentence may contain any number of other grammatical units, such as **participle phrases**, **prepositional phrases**, **subordinate clauses**, **appositives**, etc. It must, however, contain *at least* one main clause.

Consider the example below:

Dissecting a cow heart in her anatomy and physiology class, **Shenicka realized** that a cheeseburger, her favorite lunch, was no longer appetizing.

**Dissecting a cow heart** = participle phrase.

*In her anatomy and physiology class* = prepositional phrase.

*Shenicka realized* = the *essential* main clause.

*That a cheeseburger was no longer appetizing* = subordinate clause.

*Her favorite lunch* = appositive.

## Do not confuse a main clause with a subordinate clause.

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When you place a **subordinate conjunction**—a word like *when*, *because*, or *even though*—in front of a **subject** and **verb**, you will no longer have a complete thought. The group of words becomes a **subordinate clause**.

Notice how one new word creates a mystery:

**When** Diane kicked the soda machine ...

When Diane kicked it, what happened? Did the soda machine cough up her drink? Did the soda machine fall on top of poor Diane, crushing her underneath? Did quarters shoot out of the coin return like a Las Vegas slot machine payout? Because you no longer have a main clause, you no longer have a complete thought.

**Because** a giant spider has spun its web behind the shampoo bottle in Neil's bathroom ...

Because the giant spider lives there now, what has happened? Did Neil buy a can of insecticide? Does Neil now refuse to bathe? Is the spider starving because there are not enough insects for it to eat? The word *because*, a subordinate conjunction, leaves the idea unfinished, making a fragment.

**Even though** Sima and Michele are skipping their chemistry class to sit by the lake ...

Even though Sima and Michele are skipping their chemistry class, what else are they doing? Are they also studying their notes? Are they contemplating how the water in the lake is composed of hydrogen and oxygen atoms? Are they gossiping about their handsome professor? The addition of *even though* makes a subordinate clause, an *incomplete* thought.

