

## Clauses: Independent & Dependent

A clause is a word group containing a subject and verb pair. If a clause can stand alone, it is *independent*. If a clause cannot stand alone, it is *dependent*.

### Independent clauses are strong

A single independent clause is the same as a simple sentence. An independent clause contains at least one subject + verb pair, expresses a complete thought, and can be ended with a period:

*Bob and Marcie love Thai food.*  
*They eat there often and bring all their friends.*  
*Bowling is fun.*  
*Bowling shoes are stinky and sweaty.*

A single independent clause may have compound subjects (*Bob and Marcie*), compound verbs (*eat and bring*), compound adjectives (*stinky and sweaty*) or other compound elements.

When you combine two independent clauses, you create a compound sentence. You may combine independent clauses with a semicolon or with a comma + coordinating conjunction:

*Bob and Marcie love Thai food; they eat there often and bring all their friends.*  
*Bowling is fun, **but** bowling shoes are stinky and sweaty.*

### Joining independent clauses

Coordinating conjunctions join independent clauses. They are preceded by a comma when they join independent clauses (but not necessarily when they join other things):

*,for      ,and      ,nor      ,but*  
*,or      ,yet      ,so*

You may join more than two independent clauses using the above methods:

*Bowling is fun, **but** bowling shoes are stinky and sweaty, **so** we always bring thick socks.*

You may NOT try to join independent clauses with only a comma. This is an error called a comma splice.

### Dependent clauses are weak

A dependent clause standing alone is a sentence fragment. A dependent clause does contain a subject + verb pair, but it does not complete the thought it has begun. It cannot be ended with a period without creating a fragment.

*since we eat Thai food often*  
*after we go bowling*  
*because she wants organic produce*

### Joining dependent clauses to independent clauses

The words that make the above clauses incomplete are *since*, *after*, and *because*. (Without these words, the above examples would be independent clauses—*We love Thai food. We go bowling. She wants organic produce.*) The words that

make these clauses dependent are called *dependent-making words* or *subordinating conjunctions*, and the clauses they create are called *subordinate clauses*. A few common subordinating conjunctions are listed below:

<i>after</i>	<i>before</i>	<i>so that</i>	<i>when</i>
<i>although</i>	<i>even though</i>	<i>though</i>	<i>whenever</i>
<i>as if</i>	<i>if</i>	<i>unless</i>	<i>whether</i>
<i>because</i>	<i>since</i>	<i>until</i>	<i>while</i>

Dependent clauses must be joined to independent clauses that complete the thought. If the dependent clause comes first, treat it like an introductory word group and follow it with a comma.

***Since we eat Thai food often***, we would like to try Mexican food tonight.

We'll take you home ***after we go bowling***.

***Because she wants organic produce***, Melissa is growing tomatoes and peppers.

When you join an independent and a dependent clause, you create a complex sentence.

### Dependent relative clauses

Relative clauses are another type of dependent clause. Relative clauses function as adjectives, describing a noun or pronoun found in the independent clause.

The tomatoes ***that she grew from seed*** are old, heirloom varieties.

The peppers, ***which she purchased as small plants***, are jalapeños.

Mai, ***who grows strawberries every year***, loaned Jas her rototiller.

People ***who love vegetables*** often grow their own.

You need to have a spot ***where the plants get several hours of sun each day***.

### Creating compound-complex combos

An independent clause can support more than one dependent clause:

The tomatoes ***that she grew from seed*** are old, heirloom varieties ***while the cucumbers are modern hybrids***.

Compound sentences can be joined with complex sentences to form compound-complex sentences. All the same punctuation rules apply. Here the dependent clauses are emphasized:

***After we cleared the weeds***, Jas tilled the ground, and Pindy marked off the rows ***so that we could plant on Saturday***.

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever



This Yuba College Writing & Language Development Center Tip Sheet is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>