

# Clauses: Independent and Dependent

A clause is a group of words with at least one subject and one predicate.

**Subject:** A person, place, or thing that is performing the sentence's action.

**Predicate:** Words in the clause that describe the action, but not the subject.

## Independent Clauses

An independent clause expresses a complete thought and can stand alone as a sentence. Essentially, it should be able to make sense on its own.

Jack laughed.

I like to read.

The store ran out of cookies.

## Dependent Clauses

A dependent clause does not express a complete thought and does not form a sentence on its own. For a dependent clause to become a sentence, it must be connected to an independent clause to make sense. See “Joining Independent and Dependent Clauses” on the following page.

Because Jack laughed.

Whereas I like to read.

After the store ran out of cookies.

As you can see, the only difference between an independent clause and a dependent clause is one word. We call these *dependent words* or *subordinating conjunctions*. The following is a list of dependent words:

After	How	Though	Which
Although	If	Unless	While
As	In order that	Until	Who
As if	In order to	What	Whoever
As though	Once	When	Whom
As soon as	Provided that	Whenever	Whomever
Because	Since	Where	Whose
Before	So that	Wherever	
Even if	Than	Whereas	
Even though	That	Whether	

## Joining Independent and Dependent Clauses

Place a comma after a dependent clause if it comes at the beginning of a sentence. Do not use a comma if a dependent clause follows the main, independent clause:

While Sally studied, Jack laughed.

I like to read where the flowers are.

The store ran out of cookies because Santa ate them.

Because Santa ate them, the store ran out of cookies.

## Joining Two 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 compound elements). The acronym FANBOYS can help you remember the coordinating conjunctions:

**F**or

**A**nd

**N**or

**B**ut

**O**r

**Y**et

**S**o

Coordinating conjunctions are the only seven words that permit a comma between two independent clauses:

Sally studied, **and** Jack laughed.

I like to read, **but** my sister does not.

The store ran out of cookies, **for** Santa ate them.

You may NOT join independent clauses with only a comma with any other words. This is a comma splice error. For example, the following are comma splice errors:

*Sally studied, **furthermore**, Jack laughed.*

*I like to read, **however**, my sister does not.*

*The store ran out of cookies, **therefore**, Santa ate them.*

To correct these comma splice errors, use a semicolon instead of a comma to join the independent clauses:

Sally studied; **furthermore**, Jack laughed.

I like to read; **however**, my sister does not.

The store ran out of cookies; **therefore**, Santa ate them.