

## 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.

### 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 compound elements). Here are the coordinating conjunctions:

|             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| <i>,for</i> | <i>,or</i>  |
| <i>,and</i> | <i>,yet</i> |
| <i>,nor</i> | <i>,so</i>  |
| <i>,but</i> |             |

You may combine independent clauses with a semicolon or with a comma plus 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.*

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

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

When you combine independent clauses, you create a compound sentence. 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:

|          |             |         |          |
|----------|-------------|---------|----------|
| after    | before      | so that | when     |
| although | even though | though  | whenever |
| as if    | if          | unless  | whether  |
| because  | since       | until   | while    |

Dependent clauses must be joined to independent clauses that support them and 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 do the work of 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.*

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