

Types of Sentences

What is a clause?

A clause is a group of words containing a subject and a verb. All English sentences are composed of at least one clause.

How do independent clauses differ from dependent (subordinate) clauses?

Independent clauses express complete ideas and can stand on their own.

- *Julie studies at Bishop's.* (We understand that Julie studies at Bishop's – a complete thought.)

Dependent clauses do not express complete ideas and are often marked by words such as subordinating conjunctions (subordinators)* or relative pronouns**. Dependent clauses must be joined to independent clauses to form a complete thought; if they are not, they are considered *sentence fragments*, a sentence construction error.

- *Because Julie studies at Bishop's.* (We understand that Julie studying at Bishop's is the cause of something, but we do not know the effect – an incomplete thought.)

Simple sentences

Simple sentences are composed of only one independent clause. Even so, they may vary greatly.

- *Lucy works* at the pharmacy. (one **subject** and one *verb*)
- *Lucy and Jean work* at the pharmacy. (a **compound subject** and one *verb*)
- *Lucy works* at the pharmacy *and studies* at Bishop's. (one **subject** and a *compound verb*)
- *Lucy and Jean work* at the pharmacy *and study* at Bishop's. (a **compound subject** and a *compound verb*)

Compound sentences

Compound sentences are composed of two or more independent clauses joined together in one of three ways:

1. Using a semicolon

A semicolon is used to join two closely related sentences when the relationship between the sentences is clear without the use of additional words.

- Melissa passed the physics *exam*; *Marie-Claire* failed.
 - Ali went to Provigo after *class*; *he* bought three bags of groceries there.
2. *Using a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) preceded by a comma*
A coordination conjunction is used when the writer wishes to clearly show the relationship between the joined sentences.
- Michael wore only a light jacket during the *blizzard*, *yet* he felt warm enough.
 - Kristen studied for her class *yesterday*, *so* she could go the Lion this evening.
3. *Using a semicolon followed by a conjunctive adverb (transition signals) *** and a comma*
- John lost his *wallet*; *therefore*, he cancelled his debit and credit cards.
 - Lucie did not prepare for her *interview*; *nevertheless*, she was hired for the job.

Complex sentences

Complex sentences are composed of an independent clause and at least one dependent clause. The more important idea should be contained within the independent clause. If the dependent clause is at the head of the sentence, a comma is placed before the subject of the independent clause. The dependent clauses in the following sentences are *italicized*.

- *Although Bishop's is located in Quebec*, the university's language of instruction is English.
- I always dreamed of being a scientist *when I was a little girl*.

Compound-complex sentences

Compound-complex sentences are composed of at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause joined together. The dependent clauses in the following sentences are *italicized*.

- Michelle thought about starting a business *as soon as she finished university*; however, she finally decided to work for a year *because she lacked resources for her project*.
- Evelyn could accept an internship in a renowned research lab *before she continues her studies*, or she could go directly into a doctoral program.

* a few common subordinators: *because, since, when, while, if, although*

** relative pronouns: *who, whom, which, whose, that*

***a few common conjunctive adverbs/transition signals: *furthermore, however, in contrast, therefore, for example*

→ For a more complete list of connecting words, see the BU Writing Centre *Establishing Strong Connections* handout.

