



## Dependent and Independent Clauses

This handout includes information to help those who struggle with run-ons, fragments and comma splices.

A **clause** is a group of words which work together and which contain at least a subject and a verb.

An **independent clause** is a complete thought that can stand alone as a complete sentence.

A **dependent clause** is an incomplete thought that cannot stand alone as a complete sentence.

### Main clauses and dependent adverb clauses

The following clauses are independent. They are complete sentences or can be main clauses in longer sentences.

- I went to the skating rink yesterday.
- My paper was too long.
- Go home.

The below clauses are dependent, or subordinate. They cannot stand alone as complete sentences.

- After I went to the skating rink yesterday, ...
- Because my paper was too long, ...
- ...if you go home, ...

**A dependent clause must be paired with at least one independent clause to create a complete sentence.**

Connecting words called subordinating conjunctions indicate a dependent clause:

- **After** I went to the skating rink yesterday, I ran into an old friend in the parking lot.
- You'll miss the grand finale **if** you go home.

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## Common Subordinating Conjunctions

Time: after, before, until, when, while, as

Cause: because, since, so that

Condition: unless, although, if, as if, whether or not, even though

Relation: who, whose, whom, that, which, what, whatever

**If the subordinating conjunction is between the two clauses, no punctuation is needed:**

*The student signed up for a tutoring session **because** she wanted help with sentence types.*

**If the subordinating conjunction begins the sentence, put a comma between the dependent clause and the independent clause:**

***Because** she wanted help with sentence types, the student signed up for a tutoring session.*

## Other types of dependent clauses

There are two other types of dependent clauses: **adjective clauses** and **noun clauses**. The dependent adjective clauses in the sentences below are in bold.

### Adjective Clauses:

**People who live in glass houses** shouldn't throw stones.

That is the school **where I attended eleventh and twelfth grades**.

-- contains an adjective clause which modifies "school"

### Noun Clauses:

**What you don't know** can hurt you.

-- contains a noun clause as the subject.

## **Dependent and Independent Clauses**

Remember that although a subordinate clause contains a verb, it cannot be the main clause. The following sentence is **incomplete** because it lacks a main clause:

*People who own exotic pets.*

What about those people? The writer needs to complete the thought. Consider the correction below:

*People who own exotic pets usually need a special license.*

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