

PHRASES and CLAUSES

Sometimes papers are difficult to read because the reader does not receive the ideas in groups that he or she can understand. There are two reasons for this difficulty: PUNCTUATION and SENTENCE STRUCTURE problems with phrases and clauses.

- A **WORD** is a group of letters that means something.

<u>ATC</u>	<u>ACT</u>	<u>CAT</u>
(not a word)	(a word)	(a word)
This has no meaning.	This means something.	This means something.

- A **PHRASE** is a group of words that means something but has no verb

<u>morning the in</u>	<u>since midnight</u>	<u>in the morning</u>
(not a phrase)	(a phrase)	(a phrase)
This has no meaning.	This means something.	This means something.

- A **CLAUSE** is a group of words that has a subject and verb and has meaning.

<u>since midnight</u>	<u>since it was midnight</u>
(NOT a clause - no subject or verb)	(a clause - has a subject and verb)
This means something.	This means something.

There are two kinds of clauses:

1. An **INDEPENDENT CLAUSE** has a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought (this is a sentence).
2. A **DEPENDENT CLAUSE** has a subject and verb, but it does NOT express a complete thought because it starts with a subordinating conjunction (see handout). Because this kind of clause cannot stand on its own, it is NOT A SENTENCE, but a sentence FRAGMENT.

it rains in the morning

because it rains in the morning

These are both clauses because they both have a subject and verb and have meaning.

Decide if the following groups of capitalized words are phrases, clauses, or have no meaning:

	no meaning	phrase	dependent clause	independent clause
WHEN IT SNOWS IN MIAMI				
HOUSE PEDRO FROM				
WHO IS THERE?				
CONSIDERED A SHINING EXAMPLE				
The boy WHO IS THERE				
The reason WHY HE IS LEAVING				
WHY IS HE LEAVING?				
BEHIND THE DOOR				
IT RAINS				
CAME CAT IN				
SINCE YESTERDAY				

When a **DEPENDENT CLAUSE** starts the sentence, place a comma to separate the dependent clause from the independent clause: (A dependent clause **must** be attached to an independent clause in order to have a sentence; remember - a dependent clause by itself is a sentence fragment.)

DEPENDENT

INDEPENDENT

When he is nervous,
If you invite her,

he loses his appetite.
she might go with us.

When the **INDEPENDENT CLAUSE** starts the sentence, there is no need for the comma.

INDEPENDENT

DEPENDENT

He loses his appetite
She might come

when he is nervous. **(NO COMMA!)**
if you invite her. **(NO COMMA!)**

Practice:

A. *Underline the DEPENDENT CLAUSE. [HINT: Find the subordinating conjunction; then, draw a line under it and the subject and verb that follow.]*

1. Maria likes the ring because it has her birthstone in it.
2. While Teri was in class, Jose was at work.
3. I did not understand when you asked that question.
4. Although Mike does not type well, he writes all of his essays on the computer.
5. Do you know if the teacher is absent?
6. The flowers bloomed since it has rained a lot.

B. *Underline the INDEPENDENT CLAUSE.*

1. Because our copier is broken, we will have to use the one downstairs
2. Why do you ask when you already know the answers?
3. Mario wondered why Mona smiled.
4. He bought the boat that Jane had wanted to buy.
5. Whenever I hear that song, I think of Paris.
6. Since you have nothing to fear, relax.

C. *Add the Independent clause - the both ran away - to the following dependent clauses. (Add commas if necessary.)*

1. _____ when his sister caught him reading her diary.
2. Although the dog looked friendly _____.
3. After he stuck his tongue out at the bully _____.
4. Even though he hit a home run _____ because he broke a window.
5. Since he did not like broccoli _____ whenever his mother fixed it for dinner.

Here are some good rules to follow in your own writing to avoid punctuation problems:

- A. Try not to put more than three clauses in one sentence.
- B. Do not write long (three clauses) sentences one after the other. Vary your writing with short, medium, and long sentences.
- C. If one of your sentences seems too long, check it for punctuation errors, especially for periods omitted between independent clauses.
- D. Be sure you have complete sentences (independent clauses) before putting in a period.

Remember: The period represents a complete stop between thoughts. A comma represents a pause.