Phrases and Clauses

Walton College of Business Writing Center

What is a Clause?

- A **clause** is a group of words that contains both a subject and a verb.

- Each of the following samples is a clause:

The toddler must eat her carrots and peas…
…before the mother will give her any dessert.
When you call my name…
…I will be there.

Independent Clauses

- There are two types of clauses: independent clauses and subordinate clauses.

- **Independent clauses** are clauses that act as complete sentences. An independent clause is a complete thought; it does not require any additional information to be logical.

- Examples:

The toddler must eat her carrots and peas.
I will be there.

Subordinate Clauses

- **Subordinate clauses**, also called dependent clauses, are clauses that rely on independent clauses to make sense.

- Subordinate clauses are not complete thoughts and express only portions of a larger thought.

- Examples:

Before the mother will give her any dessert.
When you call my name.

Subordinate Clauses (con't)

- A subordinate clause may serve as a **noun** (describing a thing), an **adjective** (modifying a noun or pronoun) or an **adverb** (modifying an adjective, adverb, or verb).

- Subordinate clauses usually begin with **dependent words** – words that indicate that the clause will be modifying an independent clause (examples: although, when, while, who, before)

Connecting Clauses

- Example:

After *the boat reached the dock, hundreds of passengers embarked.*

The complete thought is that hundreds of passengers embarked. The subordinate clause adds information by telling us when that occurred. The word "after" is the dependent word, indicating that a subordinate clause will follow.

Connecting Clauses (con't)

- Example:

*The band **who** opened the show gave a terrible performance.*

Here, the subordinate clause is in the middle of the sentence. The complete thought is that the band gave a terrible performance. The subordinate clause ("who opened the show") adds information by telling us more about the band. The word "who" is the dependent word, indicating that a subordinate clause will follow.

Combining Clauses into Sentences

- So far, the sentences that we have looked at have been composed of a single clause. However, often we want to write a sentence that contains several thoughts. We can combine subordinate clauses and independent clauses to form more complex sentences.

- There are four types of sentence combinations: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.

Combining Clauses into Sentences (con't)

- Simple Sentences: A **simple sentence** contains a single independent clause.

Example: *He waited for morning.*

- Compound Sentence: A **compound sentence** contains at least two independent clauses.

Example: *Rome is sunny in spring, but Russia is rainy.*

- In a compound sentence, the two independent clauses are usually joined by a **coordinating conjunction**, a conjunction that joins two similar things. The coordinating conjunctions are: and, but, or, nor, for, yet, so.

Combining Clauses into Sentences (con't)

- Complex Sentence: A **complex sentence** contains an independent clause and a subordinate clause.

Example: *Because Amy got sick on the river, Jarrod took her home.*

- Compound-complex Sentence: A **compound-complex sentence** contains two independent clauses and at least one subordinate clause.

Example: *The cyclist who won the race will be at the event, but the photographers won't arrive until later.*

Using Clauses with Intent

- The way that we order clauses sends a message to the reader about which pieces of information we as writers think are most important.

- When writing, it is also important to vary the types of sentences you use. Alternate styles to keep your reader interested.

Sample Boring Paragraph

- *Paul Revere is an American hero. He carried a message about the British. The British were going to attack the colonies. The message warned people about their methods.*

- This sample paragraph uses too many simple sentences. Readers are likely to get bored and lose interest.

Sample Fixed Paragraph

- *The American hero Paul Revere is credited with spreading a message about the British. The message warned people that the British were about to attack the colonies and explained the methods they would use.*

- This revision uses strategies to connect clauses into longer sentences, making the paragraph more interesting to read.

Phrases

- A **phrase** is a group of words that does not contain a subject and a verb (it may, however, contain verbals).

- There are three types of phrases: verbal phrases, adjective/adverb phrases, and prepositional phrases.

Verbal Phrases

- **Verbal phrases** use **verbals**, words derived from verbs that act as nouns, adverbs, or adjectives in a sentence. There are three types of verbals: infinitives, participles, and gerunds.

- Infinitive phrases consist of an infinitive verb form ("to ___") plus an object. They can be nouns, adjectives or adverbs.

Example: *Emily brought me flowers <u>to make up for her mean joke.</u>*

Verbal Phrases (con't)

- Participial phrases consist of a present or past participle verb form and an object. They are used as adjectives.

Example: *The baseball coach <u>spitting tobacco on the dugout floor </u>disgusts me.*

- Gerund phrases begin with a gerund and are used as nouns.

Example: *He loves <u>embarrassing his relations</u>*.

Adjective/Adverb Phrases

- **Adjective and adverb phrases** are groups of words that work together to modify a noun or pronoun (adjectives) or an adjective, adverb, or verb (adverb).

Examples:

The <u>glowing, green</u> balloon burst.
Jacob <u>very nearly</u> destroyed his computer.

Prepositional Phrases

- **Prepositional phrases** open with prepositions and connect nouns and pronouns to other words in the sentence. Prepositional phrases act as adverb and adjective phrases.

Examples:

In the midnight air, her perfume reminded me of wisteria.
I screamed for Jerry to jump off the roof.