

What Is a Sentence?

Clauses

All sentences are made of clauses. Don't be scared: clauses are actually very simple. Clauses are created by pairing up a subject and a verb. Subjects can be nouns (people, places, or things) or pronouns (*I, you, we, he, she, it, and they*). Verbs are words that show action or a state of being.

- He reads. (*He* is the subject; *reads* is the verb.)
- When they go. (*They* is the subject; *go* is the verb.)
- Maria writes comics. (*Maria* is the subject; *writes* is the verb.)
- Because the sun shines in summer. (*Sun* is the subject; *shines* is the verb.)

Put a subject and a verb together, and you create an independent clause. This kind of clause is independent because it can stand on its own as a simple sentence. Here are some examples of independent clauses/simple sentences:

- Teresa runs.
- The rain comes in June.
- South Korea is a mountainous country.
- My cat loves hunting for mice in the field near my house.

Some clauses cannot stand alone as sentences. They are called dependent clauses and start with a dependent word. There are many dependent words, but here are a few:

Because since if while before after when although as

If you see a dependent word at the beginning of a clause, that clause is dependent and needs to be attached to an independent clause. Don't use a dependent clause on its own, or you will create a sentence fragment.

- Because she runs (a dependent clause, not a sentence)
- When the rain comes in June (a dependent clause, not a sentence)

To have a complete sentence, you must always have at least one independent clause, though you can add dependent clauses to it and even link it with other independent clauses. All of the following are complete sentences because each one has at least one independent clause:

- I do.
(This is a simple sentence with only one independent clause.)
- Teresa is healthy because she runs.
(This sentence has one independent clause and one dependent clause.)
- When the rain comes in June, the lavender blooms, and the air is delicious.
(This sentence has one dependent clause and two independent clauses.)

So what is a sentence? A sentence is an independent clause, either alone or with other clauses attached.

Is It a Sentence?

1. Does it have both a subject and a verb?
No → It isn't a clause or a sentence. Yes → It's a clause!
2. If it is a clause, does it begin with a dependent word?
No → It's a sentence! Yes → It's a dependent clause.
3. If it is a dependent clause, is it attached to an independent clause?
No → It's a fragment. Yes → It's part of a complete sentence!

Practice Exercises

1. Check off the clauses.
 - in the street
 - the sun also rises
 - if I know
 - to live and love and laugh
 - when we were going to the concert last night
 - math is fun
 - wrote a poem for Mr. Hughes
 - there and back again
 - because I could not stop
 - looking for adventure
2. Check off all the independent clauses (everything that could be a sentence).
 - I have a bad feeling about this
 - whenever you want to go
 - unless the children learn to read
 - Aya thinks about her homework
 - as time goes by
 - Mina had a bad dream last night
 - though we cannot say for sure
 - I am

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Yakima Campus, Glenn-Anthon 125 | Grandview Campus, Grandview Main 101
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