

## Connecting Independent and Dependent Clauses

As a writer, it's important to clearly structure your main ideas and supporting information. This handout can help you logically combine ideas in sentences, while avoiding fragments and other grammatical errors. First, it's fundamental to be able to distinguish between independent (main) and dependent (subordinate) clauses.

 **INDEPENDENT CLAUSE: AN INDEPENDENT CLAUSE IS A COMPLETE SENTENCE ALONE.**

All independent clauses have a subject and a verb: Marie ran.

s v

Some independent clauses also have objects: Marie ran the race.

s v obj

Some have describing nouns or adjectives in addition to Marie ran the race quickly.

the subject and verb: s v obj adv

 **DEPENDENT CLAUSE: A DEPENDENT CLAUSE ALSO HAS A SUBJECT AND A VERB, BUT LACKS INFORMATION NECESSARY TO CONVEY A COMPLETE IDEA.**

This type of clause... is signaled by...

Examples:

**Noun clause:**  
multiple words that work together as a noun.

when, where, why or how, or a relative pronoun such as that, which, what, who, whom, whose, whatever, whoever, or whichever.

- **Whoever passes the test** moves to the next level.
- He wrote many notes about **what the speaker reported**.
- It was a beautiful day, **which inspired me to take a walk**.

**Adjective clause:**  
multiple words that act as an adjective to describe a noun or pronoun.

a relative pronoun such as that, which, what, who, whom, whose, whatever, whoever, or whichever.

- Here is the nail **that popped my tire**.
- San Salvador is the town **where she grew up**.

**Adverb clause:**  
multiple words that act as an adverb to describe a verb, adjective or another adverb.

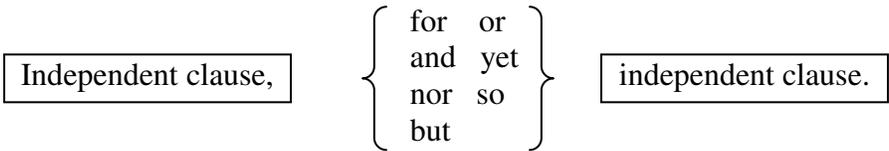
a subordinating conjunction such as after, although, as, because, before, if, since, that, unless, until, when, where, or while.

- Lucy had no doubt **that Sophia could finish her work**.
- **After we finished eating**, Dad washed the dishes.

 A dependent clause by itself is a sentence fragment and is grammatically incorrect. Notice how the examples of dependent clauses above are not complete ideas alone. Dependent clauses must be attached to an independent clause. We call this **subordination**. An independent clause can (1) stand alone as a complete sentence, (2) be **coordinated** with another independent clause, or (3) have a dependent clause **subordinated** to it.

The following formulas help writers avoid comma splices, sentence fragments and run-ons by correctly **coordinating** and **subordinating** independent and dependent clauses:

 **COORDINATION: USE A COMMA AND A FANBOYS CONJUNCTION.**



- Raul loves to run with his dog, **but** the dog’s short legs prevent her from running very far.

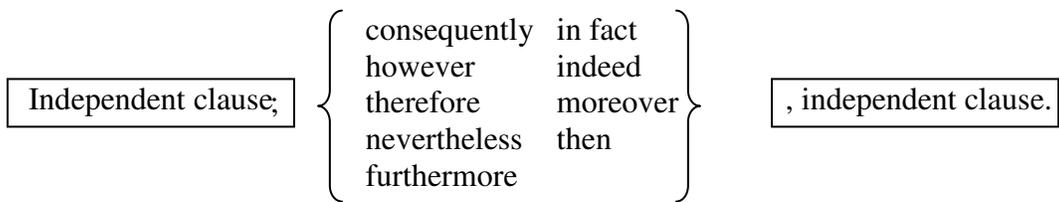
 **COORDINATION: USE A COLON OR A SEMICOLON.**

1) Use a semicolon to distinguish, but connect ideas, or when the second sentence expands on the first in a closely related way. Use a colon to introduce information related to the first clause:



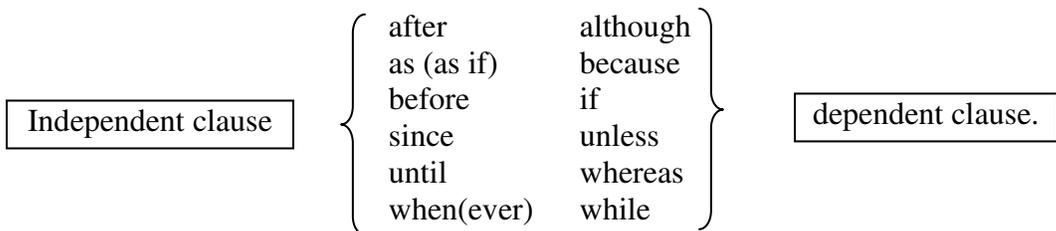
- Mary’s announcement surprised the committee: she had decided to resign.

2) Use a transition word with a semicolon helps to more specifically connect ideas:



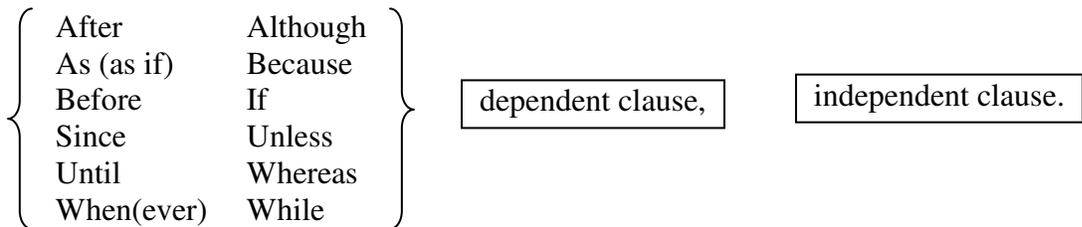
- Some believe the poem has been misinterpreted; **however**, I’ll argue that it has not been.

 **SUBORDINATION: USE TRANSITION WORDS TO CONNECT THE IDEAS IN THE FIRST AND SECOND CLAUSE.**



- Robin knew that she had to finish her homework **before** going out with her friends.

 **SUBORDINATION: WHEN YOU BEGIN A SENTENCE WITH A DEPENDENT CLAUSE THAT BEGINS WITH A TRANSITION WORD, PLACE A COMMA BETWEEN THE CLAUSES.**



- **Before** going out with her friends, Robin knew that she had to finish her homework.