Identifying Independent and Dependent Clauses

**Independent Clause**

An independent clause is a group of words that contains a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought. An independent clause is a sentence.

Jim studied in the library for his chemistry quiz.

**Dependent Clause**

A dependent clause is a group of words that contains a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought. A dependent clause cannot be a sentence. Often a dependent clause is marked by a **dependent marker word**.

**When** Jim studied in the library for his chemistry quiz . . . (What happened when he studied? The thought is incomplete.)

**Dependent Marker Word**

A dependent marker word is a word added to the beginning of an independent clause that makes it into a dependent clause.

**When** Jim studied for his chemistry quiz, it was very noisy.

Some common dependent markers are: **after**, **although**, **as**, **as if**, **because**, **before**, **even if**, **even though**, **if**, **in order to**, **since**, **though**, **unless**, **until**, **whatever**, **when**, **whenever**, **whether**, and **while**.

**Connecting independent clauses**

There are two types of words that can be used as connectors at the beginning of an independent clause: coordinating conjunctions and independent marker words.

**1. Coordinating Conjunction**

The seven coordinating conjunctions used as connecting words at the beginning of an independent clause are **and**, **but**, **for**, **or**, **nor**, **so**, and **yet**. When the second independent clause in a sentence begins with a coordinating conjunction, a comma is needed before the coordinating conjunction:

Jim studied for his chemistry quiz, **but** it was hard to concentrate because of the noise.

**2. Independent Marker Word**

An independent marker word is a connecting word used at the beginning of an independent clause. These words can always begin a sentence that can stand alone. When the second independent clause in a sentence has an independent marker word, a semicolon is needed before the independent marker word.

Jim studied for his chemistry quiz; **however**, it was hard to concentrate because of the noise.

Some common independent markers are: **also**, **consequently**, **furthermore**, **however**, **moreover**, **nevertheless**, and **therefore**.

**Connecting dependent and independent clauses**

Subordinating conjunctions allow writers to construct complex sentences, which have an independent clause and a subordinate (or dependent) clause. Either clause can come first.

The students acted differently **whenever** a substitute taught the class.

**Whenever** a substitute taught the class, the students acted differently.

Note that the clauses are separated with a comma when the dependent clause comes first. Some common subordinating conjunctions are: **after**, **as**, **before**, **once**, **since**, **until**, and **while**.

*Some Common Errors to Avoid*

**Comma Splices**

A comma splice is the use of a comma between two independent clauses. You can usually fix the error by changing the comma to a period and therefore making the two clauses into two separate sentences, by changing the comma to a semicolon, or by making one clause dependent by inserting a dependent marker word in front of it.

Incorrect: I like this class, it is very interesting.

* Correct: I like this class. It is very interesting.
* (or) I like this class; it is very interesting.
* (or) I like this class, and it is very interesting.

**Fused Sentences**

Fused sentences happen when there are two independent clauses not separated by any form of punctuation. This error is also known as a run-on sentence. The error can sometimes be corrected by adding a period, semicolon, or colon to separate the two sentences.

Incorrect: My professor is intelligent I've learned a lot from her.

* Correct: My professor is intelligent. I've learned a lot from her.
* (or) My professor is intelligent; I've learned a lot from her.
* (or) My professor is intelligent, and I've learned a lot from her.

**Sentence Fragments**

Sentence fragments happen by treating a dependent clause or other incomplete thought as a complete sentence. You can usually fix this error by combining it with another sentence to make a complete thought or by removing the dependent marker.

Incorrect: Because I forgot the exam was today.

* Correct: Because I forgot the exam was today, I didn't study.
* (or) I forgot the exam was today.

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