Writing Center

PHRASES, CLAUSES, AND SENTENCES

In order to structure your sentences accurately, you should know the difference between **phrases** and **clauses**, and you should be able to recognize two types of clasues.

Phrases

A **phrase** is a group of related words without a subject or a verb or both. A phrase may be part of a sentence but may not be used as a whole sentence.

Examples of Phrases
walking to school
eating pasta with marinara sauce
will be found
the old tennis shoe

Clauses

A **clause** is a group of related words with a subject-verb group. Every subject-verb group is a clause. There are two types of clauses.

Dependent or Subordinate Clauses

A **Dependent (subordinate)** clause is characterized by the presence of a dependent clause signal word known as a **subordinator**. The subordinator makes the clause unable to stand alone in meaning. A dependent clause by itself cannot be considered a sentence.

Examples of Dependent (Subordinate) Clauses
although cheese is his favorite food
after she washed her hair
because class was canceled
which was a relief

Independent or Main Clauses

An **Independent (main)** clause is characterized by the absence of a dependent clause signal word. Every sentence must contain at least one independent clause. Sentences may contain more than one independent clause and may contain one or more dependent clause.

Examples of Independent (main) clauses
Bonnie is wearing a new red hat. (one independent clause)
The puppy was cute, but we did not buy him. (two independent clauses)

After the wreck, he bought a new car. (one dependent and one independent)

Sentences

Note that English sentences are characterized by four criteria:
1. Capitalization of the first letter of the sentence
2. Terminal punctuation at the end: period, exclamation point, or question mark
3. At least one **independent (main) clause**
4. Expression of a complete thought

Types of Sentences

Simple: one independent (main) clause
> The kitten was white.

Compound: two or more independent (main) clauses
> The puppy was cute, but we did not buy it.
> The puppy was cute; we did not buy it.

Complex: one independent (main) clause and one or more dependent (subordinate) clauses
> We did not buy the puppy because we had no money.
> Because we had no money, we did not buy the puppy that we saw in the pet shop.
> The puppy that we wanted was a Border terrier.

Compound-complex: two or more independent (main) clauses and one or more dependent (subordinate) clauses
> The puppy was cute, but we did not buy it because we had no money; however, we could afford a less expensive kitten.
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> Although everybody in the family wanted a pet, we could not afford to buy the cute puppy that we saw at the pet shop; we agreed, however, to buy a kitten.