

Grammar:
Independent and Subordinate (Dependent) Clauses

A **clause** is a group of words that contains a verb and its subject and is used as part of a sentence. Some clauses express a complete thought. They may stand alone, or they may be joined with one or more other clauses. Other clauses do not express a complete thought. These clauses cannot stand alone. They must always be joined with at least one clause that does express a complete thought.

THE INDEPENDENT CLAUSE

An *independent* (or *main*) clause expresses a complete thought and can stand by itself as a sentence. When it stands alone, it is simply called a sentence. Usually, the term *independent clause* is used only when such a clause is joined with another clause.

SENTENCE	My mother drove me to school.
INDEPENDENT CLAUSE	Since I missed the bus, my mother drove me to school.

An independent clause may be joined with another independent clause.

EXAMPLE	My mother drove me to school, and I arrived on time.
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THE SUBORDINATE CLAUSE

A *subordinate* (or *dependent*) clause does not express a complete thought and cannot stand alone; it is not a complete sentence by itself. It must be joined with at least one independent clause to make a sentence that expresses a complete thought.

SENTENCE	I had my own horse when we lived in Montana.
<i>Independent Clause</i>	I had my own horse [can stand alone]
<i>Subordinate Clause</i>	when we lived in Montana [cannot stand alone]

The word subordinate means “less important.” A subordinate clause is less important than an independent clause because it cannot stand by itself.

The subordinate clauses in the following examples are set in boldface. Notice that each subordinate clause contains a verb and its subject. Some subordinate clauses begin with such words as *since*, *when*, *if*, or *as* (subordinating conjunctions). Others begin with such words as *who*, *which*, or *that* (relative pronouns).

EXAMPLE	As we walked along the beach , we searched for shells.
	The rocks that I collected on my vacation are on my desk.

Exercise A: Some of the following groups of words are independent clauses (sentences), although they are written without capital letters and periods. Others are subordinate clauses, and

still others are phrases (phrases do not contain subjects and verbs). After each number, write **IC** if the group of words is an independent clause, **SC** if it is a subordinate clause, and **P** if it is a phrase.

EXAMPLES

the news traveled fast **IC**
After many years **P**
As she entered the room **SC**

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|---------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|
| 1. the shuttle landed safely | _____ | 6. having been told | _____ |
| 2. at the next corner | _____ | 7. since last Tuesday | _____ |
| 3. if you have had lunch | _____ | 8. at half time we will leave | _____ |
| 4. after the game | _____ | 9. if the snow stops | _____ |
| 5. the catcher dropped the ball | _____ | 10. as she waited for the bus | _____ |

Exercise B: Each of the following sentences contains a subordinate clause. Identify the subordinate clause by putting parentheses around it. Then, circle the subject and underline the verb of the subordinate clause.

EXAMPLE

When you go to the store, please buy me some bread.

1. A mirror is a piece of polished metal or glass that is coated with a substance such as silver.
2. The most common type of mirror is the plane mirror, which is flat.
3. The image that is seen in a plane mirror is reversed.
4. As you look into a mirror, your left hand seems to be the image's right hand.
5. When an image is reversed, it is called a "mirror image."
6. A submarine sailor who looks through a periscope is using a system of lenses and mirrors to see above the water's surface.
7. Right-hand rear-view mirrors on cars, which show a wide area of the road behind, are usually convex, or curved outward.
8. If you remember the story of Snow White, you know the important part played by a talking mirror.
9. Since the mirror in a flashlight is concave, or curved inward, it strengthens the light from a small light bulb.