**Complex Sentences**

**Complex Sentence Guidelines**

Definition - A complex sentence is a sentence that is composed of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. Writers use complex sentences to indicate the relative importance and the relationship between the ideas in the different clauses.

An independent clause contains one subject + verb pair and expresses a complete thought. When used alone, an independent clause is a Simple Sentence.

A dependent clause is introduced by a subordinating word and contains one subject + verb pair. It does not express a complete thought; therefore, it must be combined with an independent clause to complete the meaning. If a dependent clause is used without an accompanying independent clause, the result is a sentence fragment, which is a major grammatical error. (For more help identifying and correcting fragment errors, see the “ Fragments Guidelines.”)

In a complex sentence , the independent clause contains the primary or most important idea. The dependent clause contains a secondary or less important idea. The process of combining independent and dependent clauses together in one sentence is called subordination. Subordination involves ranking ideas according to importance.

Subordinating Conjunctions

The words that are used to relate dependent clauses to independent clauses are called subordinators.

The subordinating word is the first word in the dependent clause.

The two types of subordinators are subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns. Click on link at the top of the page for a discussion of conjunctions.

1. There are many subordinating conjunctions that can be used to introduce subordinate clauses. Some of the most common subordinating conjunctions are although, because, after, unless, since, as, than, where, while, and before. (For a more complete listing of subordinating conjunctions, select Links on the action menu above.)

Examples

\* Although they had little chance of winning, Nathan and his friends worked for months restoring the '57 Chevy to be entered in the street races during spring break.

[This sentence starts with the dependent clause "although they had little chance of winning," which is introduced by the subordinating conjunction "although."]

\* At the last minute, they had to withdraw from the race because the brakes developed a dangerous malfunction.

[This sentence ends with the dependent clause "because the brakes developed a dangerous malfunction," which is introduced by the subordinating conjunction "because."]

2. In some instances, a phrase of two or more words acts as the subordinating conjunction; some examples are even though, as long as, even if, so that, and as if.

Examples

\* Phillip climbed up the tree and sawed off the dead limb so that it could not break off and fall on the roof during a storm.

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "so that it could not break off and fall on the roof during a storm" - is introduced by the subordinating conjunction "so that."]

\* As long as he was already up in the tree, he decided to trim off some of the other branches that were rubbing against the side of the house.

[This sentence begins with the dependent clause, "as long as he was already up in the tree," which is introduced by the subordinating conjunction "as long as."]

3. The choice of which subordinating conjunction to use is based on the relationship of the ideas in the two clauses.

Examples

\* Todd decided to take off of work and accompany his friends on a road trip to Las Vegas since he had not had a vacation in over three years.

[The choice of the word "since" in this sentence indicates that the idea in the independent clause at the start of the sentence (taking a trip) is the effect of the idea in the dependent clause at the end of the sentence (going three years without a vacation).]

\* Marta longs to own a red convertible Mustang even though she does not have a valid driver's license.

[The choice of the words "even though" in this sentence indicates that the idea in the first clause (wanting a car) is the opposite of what would be expected from the second clause (not being able to drive).]

Relative Pronouns

1. There are several relative pronouns that can be used to introduce subordinate clauses . Some of the most frequently used relative pronouns include the following: that, which, what, who, whoever, whom, and whose. (For a more complete listing of relative pronouns, see any English handbook.)

Examples

\* Cami frantically looked throughout the house for her cell phone, which she had accidentally dropped out of her backpack earlier that day.

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "which she had accidentally dropped out of her backpack earlier that day" - is introduced by the relative pronoun "which."]

\* Unfortunately, she waited several days to report the loss to the phone company that she used for cell phone service.

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "that she used for cell phone service" - is introduced by the relative pronoun "that."]

2. Sometimes the relative pronoun acts as both the subordinator and the subject of the dependent clause.

Examples

\* Electrical power in the neighborhood was knocked out for three days by the hurricane that struck the gulf coast last September.

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "that struck the gulf coast last September" - is introduced by the relative pronoun "that." The subject of the dependent clause is also the word "that," and the verb is "struck."]

\* The aggressive Lottery advertisements in low-income neighborhoods increased ticket sales among the people who could least afford to lose money by gambling.

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "who could least afford to lose money by gambling" - is introduced by the relative pronoun "who." The subject of the dependent clause is also the word "who" and the verb is "could afford."]

Methods For Constructing Complex Sentences

The use of punctuation in complex sentences varies according to the order in which the clauses are used in the sentence as well as the importance of the information contained within the dependent clause.

1. A dependent clause can be placed at the beginning of the sentence, before the independent clause in a sentence. When the dependent clause begins the sentence and the independent clause follows, a comma is used to separate the two clauses.

Examples

\* Because they were expecting company for supper , Alice reminded Brian to pick up a bag of ice and then hurry home.

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "because they were expecting company for supper" - is introduced by the subordinating word "because." Since the dependent clause occurs before the independent clause, a comma is used between the two clauses.]

o As long as he was on time for supper , Brian saw no reason to rush through the store without purchasing some other needed items.

The dependent clause in this sentence - "as long as he was on time for supper" - is introduced by the subordinating conjunction "As long as." Since it occurs before the independent clause, a comma is used between the two clauses.]

A dependent clause can be placed after the independent clause.

Examples:

\* The sudden rainstorm surprised the trail riders while they were stopped for their lunch break .

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "while they were stopped for their lunch break" - is introduced by the subordinating word "while."]

\* The president of the company announced a mid-year pay raise for all the sales staff, which came as a surprise to most of them .

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "which came as a surprise to most of them" - is introduced by the subordinating word "which."]

2. When the dependent clause falls at the end of the sentence, the importance of the dependent clause to the meaning of the sentence determines whether or not commas are used to separate the dependent clause from the independent clause.

1. Essential Dependent Clauses . If the dependent clause contains information that is necessary for the sentence to convey its meaning, then the dependent clause is considered "essential." Essential dependent clauses are not set apart with commas. (Another term often used to describe "essential" elements in a sentence is "restrictive.")

Examples

o The sudden rainstorm surprised the trail riders while they were stopped for their lunch break .

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "while they were stopped for their lunch break" - must be included for the reader to get the full meaning of the sentence; therefore, it is essential to the sentence and no comma is used to set it apart from the independent clause.]

o The CEO informed the employees about the merger before the newspapers published the announcement .

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "before newspapers published the announcement" - must be included for the reader to get the full meaning of the sentence; therefore, it is essential to the sentence and no comma is used to set it apart from the independent clause.]

2. Non-essential Dependent Clauses . If the information contained in the dependent clause could be omitted without changing the meaning of the sentence, it is considered non-essential. Commas are placed both before and after a non-essential dependent clause to set it off from the independent clause . (Another term often used to describe "non-essential" elements in a sentence is "non-restrictive.")

Examples

o I am planning an eight-day trip to Hawaii with my sister Katrina, who is always ready for a new adventure .

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "who is always ready for a new adventure" - is introduced by the relative pronoun "who." The extra information about the sister is not required to understand the main message about the trip to Hawaii, so it is considered "non-essential" and set off with a comma.]

o The president of the company announced a mid-year pay raise for all the sales staff, which came as a surprise to most of them .

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "which came as a surprise to most of them" - is introduced by the subordinating conjunction "which." It is not essential to the meaning of the sentence; therefore, no comma is used to set it apart.]

The following general guidelines are helpful in determining whether a dependent clause is essential or non-essential.

\* Dependent clauses that are introduced by subordinating conjunctions, or by the relative pronoun "that" are usually essential to the meaning of the sentence.

\* Dependent clauses that are introduced by the relative pronoun "which" are usually non-essential to the meaning of the sentence.

\* Dependent clauses that are introduced by the other relative pronouns may be either "essential" or "non-essential," depending on the content of the clauses involved.

3. A dependent clause can be inserted into the middle of the independent clause.

Example

\* The guilty person, whoever he or she may be , will be caught and charged with the crime.

[The independent clause in this sentence is "The guilty person will be caught and charged with the crime." The dependent clause in this sentence, "whoever he or she may be," is inserted within the independent clause.]

\* The houses that were built during the early 1900's need renovation to update the electrical and plumbing systems.

[The independent clause in this sentence is "The houses need renovation to update the electrical and plumbing systems." The dependent clause in this sentence - "that were built in the early 1900's" - is inserted within the independent clause.]

In these sentences, the importance of the dependent clause to the meaning of the sentence determines whether or not commas are used to separate the dependent clause from the independent clause.

1. Essential Dependent Clauses . If the dependent clause contains information that is necessary for the sentence to retain its meaning, then the dependent clause is considered "essential." Essential dependent clauses are not set apart with commas.

Examples

\* The woman who lives three houses down from my parents grows the most lavish flower gardens in the neighborhood.

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "who lives three houses down from my parents" - is essential to distinguish which particular woman the sentence is about. If the dependent clause were eliminated, the meaning of the sentence would be unclear; therefore, no commas are used to separate the dependent clause from the two parts of the independent clause.]

\* I am offering the book that I received on my last birthday to the first person to come through the door with a ten-dollar bill.

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "that I received on my last birthday" - is essential to distinguish which particular book will be given away. If the dependent clause were eliminated, the meaning of the sentence would be changed; therefore, no commas are used to separate the dependent clause from the two parts of the independent clause.

2. Non-essential Dependent Clauses. If the information contained in the dependent clause could be omitted without changing the meaning of the sentence, it is considered non-essential. Commas are placed both before and after the non-essential dependent clause to set it off from the independent clause.

Examples

\* My Aunt Bessie, who lives three houses down from my parents , grows the most lavish flower gardens in the neighborhood.

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "who lives three houses down from my parents" - offers extra information, but it is not necessary to distinguish which particular woman the sentence is about because she has been specifically named. If the dependent clause were omitted, the meaning of the sentence would still be clear; therefore, commas are used to separate the dependent clause from the two parts of the independent clause.]

\* I am offering this copy of Shakespeare's Comedies, which I received on my last birthday , to the first person to come through the door with a ten-dollar bill.

[The dependent clause in this sentence - "which I received on my last birthday" - offers extra information, but is not necessary to distinguish which particular book will be given away. If the dependent clause were omitted, the meaning of the sentence would still be clear; therefore, commas are used to separate the dependent clause from the two parts of the independent clause.

3. Omitted Subordinators. Essential clauses often begin with the relative pronoun "that." Frequently, the word "that" is not actually written in the sentence, but is considered an understood part of the dependent clause.

**Complex Sentence Activities**

Instructions: Read the Guidelines for Complex Sentences before you complete the following activities. The Extended Learning Center provides all the books you will need to complete these activities.

Tutoring: You may see a tutor for help with understanding any of the following activities.

Activities:

Grammar textbook work :Do not write in the textbooks. Either photocopy the exercise pages from the text or complete the assignments on your own paper (Note: to utilize your time effectively, write short answers whenever possible, rather than copying entire sentences).

1. Odyssey (3 rd edition) :

1. Read Using Subordination on pages 292-295.

2. Complete Exercise 19.1.

3. Practice using subordination by completing one (your choice) of the following: Exercise 19.5 and 19.2 on pages 294-295.

2. Writer's Choice :

1. Complete Review Exercise 1 on page 557.

3. Sentence Essentials :

1. Read pages 249-257.

2. Complete Practice 2 on pages 254-55 and Practice 4 on page 257.

4. The Little, Brown Handbook (8 th edition) :

1. Read Section 24b (pages 434-438).

2. Complete Exercise 3 on page 438.

Turn in all work assigned by your instructor before you take the Complex Sentence Test.

**The Complex Sentence**

**PRACTICE TEST**

(3 pages, 10¢/page for print jobs in ELC)

PART I: Some of the following sentences contain errors in punctuation of dependent clauses, and some are punctuated correctly. Mark as follows:

“A” for correct

“B” for incorrect

1. An increasing number of people use credit in anticipation of higher incomes in the future, which gets many people into financial trouble.

1. Correct

2. Incorrect

2. Using credit cards, that provide an itemized, written record of purchases, can simplify the process of home accounting.

1. Correct

2. Incorrect

3. Merchants sometimes offer “free” credit to allow buyers to pay later without incurring finance charges because this strategy prompts consumers to make impulsive purchases.

1. Correct

2. Incorrect

4. If the buyer pays even one day after the allotted free-credit period ends interest may be owed for the entire time period, eliminating the “free” credit benefit.

1. Correct

2. Incorrect

5. The purchase of big-ticket items before they can realistically be afforded has caused many consumers to jeopardize their financial futures.

1. Correct

2. Incorrect

PART II: Choose the item that correctly completes the complex sentence.

6. Although many people have conflicting feelings about the use of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ may still be attracted to the ease of using a credit card to purchase a new television through monthly payments.

1. credit they

2. credit, they

3. credit; they

4. credit. They

7. A recent survey \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ one out of three U.S. householders truly fears becoming overextended on credit.

1. revealed that

2. revealed, that

3. revealed; that

4. revealed: that

8. The consumer should approach all credit usage as an opportunity to build an excellent credit \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ will allow the person to obtain future credit as needed and at the lowest possible rates.

1. history. Which

2. history; which

3. history, which

4. history which

9. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_must repay the amount owed in a specific number of equal \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ incurred installment credit.

1. Consumers; who / payments; have

2. Consumers who / payments, have

3. Consumers, who / payments, have

4. Consumers who / payments have

10. The credit limits and conditions offered to consumers may \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ different borrowers have accumulated different credit histories to prove their creditworthiness.

1. vary since

2. vary, since

3. vary; since

4. vary. Since

PART III: For each of the sentences in the paragraph below, mark as follows:

“A” if the sentence is a Complex Sentence

“B” if the sentence is not a Complex Sentence

(11) A significant negative aspect that is associated with credit use is the large number of fees assessed by creditors, especially credit card issuers. (12) Some of these fees are associated with normal usage of the credit card issuers; however, consumers should be watchful about added costs. (13) Some bank credit card lenders assess annual fees ranging from $25 to $50 or more.

(14) In addition, lenders may charge a transaction fee, which is a small charge levied each time a card is used. (15) Some even charge a fee for printing the monthly credit bill. (16) When all fees are considered, a low-cost card may turn into a high-cost card.

(17) If the borrower fails to make a payment by the due date, late-payment fees of $25 and more are common. (18) Many credit card issuers now charge a significant over-the-limit fee when the cardholder exceeds his or her credit limit. (19) In addition, banks are increasingly likely to impose punitive interest rates on certain borrowers with a problematic credit history. (20) The combination of the fees and higher rates these credit card companies are charging can easily exceed the “normal” finance charge.

(All test items adapted from Personal Finance, Seventh Edition . Lowenfeld and Brittain. Boston , MA : Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003.)

Answer Key: The Complex Sentence Practice Test

Part I

1. A

2. B

3. A

4. B

5. A

Part II

6. B

7. A

8. C

9. D

10. A

Part III

11. A

12. B

13. B

14. A

15. B

16. A

17. A

18. A

19. B

20. A