



**IIT Madras**  
ONLINE DEGREE

# **CLAUSE STRUCTURE**

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- Clause is a higher level structure than phrase.
- Just as a phrase has one or more words, a clause has one phrase or more.
- For instance, see the following sentence.

*It was Monday morning.*

It has two phrases:

- NP [*It*]
- VP [*was Monday morning*]
- NP [*Monday morning*]

- But a clause is a higher structure than a phrase. A clause has at least one verb with tense. See the following.

*He recollected what work he had for the day.*

- There are two clauses in this sentence.
  - *He recollected*
  - *what work he had for the day.*

- You may note that both the clauses have at least one verb each with tense. In clause (4), “recollect” is in past tense, making it “recollected”.
- In clause (5), “had” is also a past tense auxiliary verb.

- The following sentence has only one clause.

*It was Monday morning.*

Why does it have only one clause?

Because it has one verb only, “was”, and it is in past tense

- The following sentence, on the other hand, has three clauses.

*Swaminathan left his seat, jumped on the platform, and placed his note-book on the table.*

- Can you say which clauses?
  - a. Swaminathan left his seat,*
  - b. jumped on the platform,*
  - c. and placed his note-book on the table.*

# ACTIVITY

1. Can you say how many clauses each of the following sentences has. You can also make a note of these clauses separately and compare your work with answers given at the end.
  - a. Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes.
  - b. He considered Monday specially unpleasant in the calendar
  - c. By eight he was at his desk in his room, which was only a corner in his father's dressing-room.
  - d. He had a table on which all his things were thrown in a confused heap.



# ANSWERS

## Activity 1 :

- a. *Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes.* – One clause only, only one verb, “was”.
- b. *He considered Monday specially unpleasant in the calendar* – one clause only because it has only one verb “consider” which has an +ed and , therefore, is in the past tense.
- c. *By eight he was at his desk in his room, which was only a corner in his father's dressing-room.*

It has two clauses, because it has two verbs with tense.

1. By eight he was at his desk in his room,
  2. which was only a corner in his father's dressing-room.
- It has two clauses, one in c.1 with “was”, past tense, after “eight”. The other in c.2 has only one verb, “was”, which is a past tense auxiliary verb.

- On these lines you can create for yourself more exercises and check them with a dictionary. Once you identify a verb with tense, you have identified a clause, no matter how big or small.

- A sentence must have at least one clause with complete information, without having to depend on elements outside itself.
- But each clause is not a sentence. If that clause does not have both subject and its Verb inside, then it cannot be a sentence by itself, though it is still a clause.

*He had a table on which all his things were thrown in a confused heap.*

- So, “He had a table” is both a clause and a sentence. But “on which all his things were thrown in a confused heap” is incomplete for meaning. Without going outside the clause, you do not know what noun “which” refers to.

- The following sentence has only one verb with tense, and therefore has only one clause and that clause is a sentence.

*There were huge windows on the left showing vast open grounds bound at the other extreme by the railway embankment.*

# ACTIVITY

2. How many clauses are there in the following sentence? Identify them. You can also say which of these clauses can be a sentence, and which others cannot be.

*Mani replied that he had a pair of wooden clubs at home with which he would break the backs of those that dared to tamper with him.*

# ANSWERS

- a. Mani replied*
  - b. that he had a pair of wooden clubs at home*
  - c. with which he would break the backs of those*
  - d. that dared to tamper with him.*
- 
- a. can be a sentence.
  - b. b. is a sentence any way.
  - c. c-d are sentences but a part of each of them depends upon other elements to complete their sense.

- Those clauses that can make a sentence by themselves are called “Principal Clause”, or “Main Clause”, or “Independent Clause”. Others are called “Subordinate Clause”.
- Look at the following sentence again.

*Mani replied that he had a pair of wooden clubs at home with which he would break the backs of those that dared to tamper with him.*



- Main and subordinate clauses in this sentence are as follows:

<b>Main Clause</b>	<b>Subordinate clause</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mani replied</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• that he had a pair of wooden clubs at home</li><li>• with which he would break the backs of those</li><li>• that dared to tamper with him.</li></ul>

# ACTIVITY

3. Look at the following sentence and then identify main and subordinate clauses there.
  - a. Those were the four that he liked and admired most in his class.
  - b. No teacher ever tried to prod him.
  - c. Mani bullied all strangers that came his way
  - d. People usually slunk aside when he passed.
  - e. He solved any problem that was given to him in five minutes

# ANSWERS

	<b>Main Clause</b>	<b>Subordinate Clause</b>
a.	Those were the four	that he liked and admired most in his class.
b.	No teacher ever tried to prod him	
c.	Mani bullied all strangers	that came his way
d.	People usually slunk aside	when he passed.
e.	He solved any problem in five minutes	that was given to him

Thank You!