

Linking Clauses and Sentences

What is a clause?

A clause is a part of a sentence that has a subject and verb. Some sentences only have one clause. These are called **simple sentences**:

The man walked down the street.
Everyone likes chocolate.

Some sentences have more than one clause. These are called **compound** or **complex sentences**. Compound sentences use coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS) to connect clauses, while complex sentences use subordinating conjunctions.

Compound-complex sentences are also possible – these have three or more clauses, and use both coordinating and subordinating conjunctions:

*Sam really enjoys this band's music, **but** his friend doesn't like it.* (compound sentence)
*I always study in the evening **because** I have to work during the daytime.* (complex sentence)
***When** I arrive at school late, I apologize to the teacher.* (complex sentence)
*She will be upset **if** she misses her flight, **so** she has decided to arrive at the airport very early.* (compound-complex sentence)

When you have more than one clause in a sentence, you must link them using a conjunction.

Notes:

- When a subordinating conjunction comes in the middle of a sentence, after the first clause, no comma is needed. If the subordinating conjunction comes at the beginning of the sentence, then a comma is needed after the first clause:

*I stayed home **because** I was sick.*
***Because** I was sick, I stayed home.*

- In academic writing, coordinating conjunctions (like **and**, **so**, **but**, and **or**) must come after the first clause in the sentence, and should have a comma before them. You might see and hear people use coordinating conjunctions at the beginning of sentences, but this is usually not appropriate in formal or academic writing, and it would be better to avoid this.

*I was sitting at home with nothing to do, **so** I decided to go to a movie theatre.*
(correct)
*I was sitting at home with nothing to do. **So**, I decided to go to a movie theatre.*
(incorrect)

Common mistakes:

Read the following two sentences. What is wrong with each sentence? Write the name of the type of problem, and then try to fix the sentence.

1. *Tim Hortons is very popular in Canada, it has many delicious drinks.*

Name of problem:

Correct version of this sentence:

2. *Tim Hortons is very popular in Canada it has many delicious drinks.*

Name of problem:

Correct version of this sentence:

The problem with sentence number one is called a **comma splice**. This is when a sentence has two clauses that are separated by a comma, but the writer has not used any conjunction to connect the two clauses.

The problem with sentence number two is called a **run-on sentence**. This is when a sentence has two or more clauses, but the writer has not used any punctuation or conjunctions to connect the clauses.

Linking devices:

Conjunctions are a kind of **linking device** because they link, or connect, clauses within a sentence. In academic writing, we also use **transition signals** often in order to link separate sentences that are related, or have a connection, to each other. We can also use transition signals to show that we are transitioning (moving on to) a new idea or section.

When you are writing, it is essential to choose the correct conjunction or transition signal to use based on context. On the next page, you will find a chart that shows which conjunctions and transition signals to use in various contexts. We will be doing lots of practice on this topic, and it is something that will continue to be emphasized in your writing tasks.

| Context | Transition Signals | Coordinating Conjunctions | Subordinating Conjunctions |
|--|---|----------------------------------|--|
| Showing an additional idea / Making an additional point | in addition furthermore moreover also | and | |
| Showing a contrast or differing point | on the other hand in contrast nevertheless however | but | although though even though while whereas |
| Showing a choice or alternative | instead | or | |
| Showing a condition | | | if unless |
| Giving an example | for example for instance | | |
| Showing a cause or reason | | | because since |
| Showing a result or effect | therefore as a result consequently as a consequence | so | |
| Showing a similarity | similarly likewise in the same way | just as | |
| Introducing a conclusion or summary | in conclusion in summary to conclude to summarize in brief | | |
| Showing a time relationship | first, second, third, etc. finally next after that then subsequently previously meanwhile | | before after when whenever while as soon as until since |

Note: This chart shows some common conjunctions and transition signals that we will look at this semester. However, it is not a complete list.