



OU Writing Center  
The University of Oklahoma

## Types of Clauses and How to Use Them

This guide defines and discusses different types<sup>1</sup> of clauses we use when we write. Using a variety of clauses can help us avoid overly repetitive or “choppy” writing.

### What is a clause?

A **clause** is a grammatical structure that has a subject and a verb.

### What is an independent clause?

It is a grammatical construction that contains both a subject and verb and also expresses a complete thought.

### What is a dependent clause?

It is a grammatical construction that contains a subject and verb but doesn't express a complete idea. These do a lot of work, adding richness and context to a sentence but need to be anchored to an independent clause to make sense.

#### *Types of dependent clauses*

- **Essential clause** – provides extra **information that is needed** in order to correctly identify or specify something about the noun it follows. These are required for the essential meaning to be conveyed correctly.
  - Example: “Maria ***who is from Venezuela*** gave me valuable advice on where to travel in South America.”

In this example, Maria being from Venezuela is an important, necessary part of the work being done in the sentence (i.e. giving advice that's valuable).

- **Non-essential clause** – provides extra information about the noun it follows but is **not needed for the essential meaning of the sentence to be communicated**.
  - Example: “Jorgé, ***who is from Colombia***, broke his finger.”

---

<sup>1</sup> You'll see the essential portion of each definition in **blue text that is bolded**.

The portion of each following example that shows the definition action is ***red, bolded, and italicized***.

In this example, the information regarding Jorgé’s native country is extra and doesn’t have any bearing upon the fact that he broke his finger.

- **Relative clause** – **takes the place of an adjective** in a sentence. It relates to or describes the noun that it follows. It answers questions like “Which one?” or “What kind?”
  - Example: “I bought the hoodie *that was grey.*”

## Types of Sentences

Clauses can be combined into different types of sentences to do different work.

A **simple sentence** **has only one independent clause.**

Example: “*I love coffee.*”

**Compound sentences** contain **two (or more) independent clauses joined by 1) a coordinating conjunction, 2) a semicolon, or 3) a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb.**

Examples:

1. I want *Panera, but I also* need to save money.
2. I order Panera all *the time; the Door Dash* driver knows me by name.
3. I need to *go shopping; however,* it’s a game day, and traffic is awful.

Varying your sentence structures is an easy way to keep your writing fresh and interesting. Consider the relationships between or among the items or topics in your sentence when using multiple clauses. Remember, complex sentences do not automatically mean good writing!



This document was created by Mandi M. McRay, graduate assistant director and graduate writing consultant at the University of Oklahoma’s Writing Center. Created 2022 under Creative Commons license BY NC SA.

[CC BY-NC-SA](#): This license allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator. If you remix, adapt, or build upon the material, you must license the modified material under identical terms.