



TERMS TO KNOW: Vital Sentence Elements

SENTENCE: A group of words that names at least one person or thing and expresses a complete thought about it. (The same definition applies to **independent** and **main clauses**.)

Ex: The mouse ran up the clock.

SUBJECT: The part of a sentence that names what the sentence is about. The **complete subject** includes a *noun* or *pronoun* plus the words that describe it. The **simple subject** is the unadulterated noun or pronoun.

Ex: **The little gray mouse** ran up the clock.
 complete subject
 simple subject

Some sentences have **compound subjects**, which contain two or more simple subjects:

Ex. **The little gray mouse and its cousin** ran up the clock together.

PREDICATE: The part of a sentence that tells what the subject does, or what it is, or what happens to it. At the very least, the predicate must contain a **verb**, and it usually includes additional words to complete the thought of the sentence (the **complement**). A **compound predicate** contains more than one verb.

Ex: The little gray mouse **ran up the clock and jumped down onto the piano**.
 verb complement verb complement

VERB: An essential part of every sentence – the word that tells what the subject does, what it is, or what happens to it. The verb is the word in the predicate that changes to indicate what tense (time frame) it is expressing.

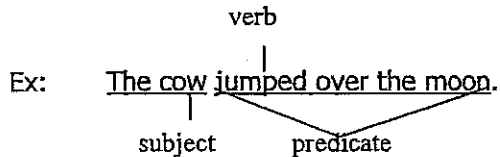
Ex: All the little gray mice **run** in a pack. (present tense verb)
 Yesterday, one of the mice **ran** up the clock in record time. (past tense)

Auxiliary (helping) verbs: Usually some form of BE, DO, or HAVE that combines with the base form of another verb to help it express what happens to the subject.

Ex: One little mouse **has** run out of steam. (has = auxiliary verb)

TERMS TO KNOW: Clauses and Sentence Types

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE (sometimes called MAIN CLAUSE): group of words that consists of a **subject** and **predicate** (including a **verb**) and makes a complete statement. Every **sentence** must contain at least one independent clause, and an independent clause can stand alone as a sentence.



DEPENDENT CLAUSE (sometimes called SUBORDINATE CLAUSE): group of words that contains a **subject** and a **verb**, but does not make a complete statement -- so it's *not* a **sentence**.

Some dependent clauses start with **relative pronouns** (*who, whom, whose, which, that*). These are called **relative clauses**, and they act as adjectives, modifying the noun or pronoun that comes before them.

Ex: Old McDonald's cow, **which must have been on steroids**, jumped over the moon.

Other dependent clauses start with **subordinate conjunctions** (such as *after, although, because, before, if, since, when, while* and many others). Putting a subordinate conjunction at the beginning of the clause makes it sound incomplete; it depends on something else to complete its meaning.

Ex: **Because she was looking for greener pastures**, (dependent clause – not a complete thought)

Because she was looking for greener pastures, the cow jumped over the moon.

dependent clause

independent clause

NOTE: Without the word "because," the clause "she was looking for greener pastures" could stand alone as an independent clause; it would be a complete sentence. The addition of "because" or any other subordinate conjunction is what makes the clause sound incomplete.

A dependent clause that is not attached to an independent clause is just a partial sentence; it is one type of sentence fragment.

COMPOUND SENTENCE: Has two or more **independent clauses** joined by a **semicolon** or by a **comma** plus coordinating conjunction (*and, or, but, for, yet, so*).

Ex: **The cow jumped over the moon; NASA decided to investigate.**