Phrases and Clauses

I. A phrase is a collection of words that may have nouns or verbals, but it does not have a subject doing a verb. The following are examples of phrases:

- leaving behind the dog
- smashing into a fence
- before the first test
- after the devastation
- between ignorance and intelligence
- broken into thousands of pieces
- because of her glittering smile

In these examples above, you will find nouns (dog, fence, test, devastation, ignorance, intelligence, thousands, pieces). You also have some verbals (leaving, smashing), but in no case is the noun functioning as a subject doing a predicate verb. They are all phrases.

II. A clause is a collection of words that has a subject that is actively doing a verb. The following are examples of clauses:

- since she laughs at diffident men
- I despise individuals of low character
- when the saints go marching in
- Obediah Simpson is uglier than a rabid raccoon
- because she smiled at him

In the examples above, we find either a noun or a pronoun that is a subject (bold-print) attached to a predicate verb (underlined) in each case:

- since she laughs at diffident men
- I despise individuals of low character
- when the saints go marching in
- Obediah Simpson is uglier than a rabid raccoon
- because she smiled at him

III. If the clause could stand by itself, and form a complete sentence with punctuation, we call the clause an independent clause. The following are independent clauses:

- I despise individuals of low character
- Obediah Simpson is uglier than a rabid raccoon

We could easily turn independent clauses into complete sentences by adding appropriate punctuation marks. We might say, "I despise individuals of low character." Or we might write, "Obediah Simpson is uglier than a rabid raccoon!"
**independent** because these types of clauses can stand independently by themselves, without any extra words attached, and be complete sentences.

- **IV. Dependent clauses** have a subject doing a verb, but they have a **subordinate conjunction** placed in front of the clause. That subordinate conjunction means that the clause can't stand independently by itself and become a complete sentence. Instead, the dependent clause is **dependent** upon another clause--it can't make a complete sentence by itself, even though it has a subject doing a verb.

**Common Subordinating Conjunctions/Dependant Words**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>after</th>
<th>because</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>who, whose, whom</td>
<td>what, whatever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before</td>
<td>since</td>
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<td>when</td>
<td>that</td>
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<td>while</td>
<td>whether...or not</td>
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<td>as</td>
<td>although</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as if</td>
<td>which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>so that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here are some examples of dependent clauses:

- since **she** laughs at diffident men
- when the **saints** go marching in
- because **she** smiled at him

These clauses simply do not form complete thoughts or sentences by themselves. Those subordinate conjunctions--since, when, and because, cause the listener to expect the speaker to add some extra material. The thought is incomplete. If you walked up to a friend in the dorms and said, "since she laughs at diffident men," and then walked away without adding an independent clause, the friend would be completely baffled.

It's important to understand the difference between phrases, dependent clauses, and independent clauses because many punctuation marks--such as commas, semicolons, and colons, require one or the other.
Exercises

Directions: In the space before each group of words, mark P if it is a phrase, D if it is a dependent clause and I if it is an independent clause.

_____ 1. Over my head
_____ 2. Because I was afraid
_____ 3. I didn’t get very much sleep
_____ 4. That night
_____ 5. I knew what happened
_____ 6. So that I could get some rest
_____ 7. I heard the cat’s meow
_____ 8. Sitting by the broken plate licking the crumbs
_____ 9. When I finally got up
_____10. I got so tired
_____11. Even though I counted sheep
_____12. Ear plugs would be a good investment
_____13. I never realized how losing sleep affected me
_____14. The next day
_____15. When I got to work
_____16. I forgot to lock the door of my car
_____17. Walking into the parking garage
_____18. Did you ever get a strange feeling that someone was around you
_____19. On the back of my neck
_____20. All because I hadn’t had enough sleep
Using a variety of sentence types can make your writing flow better. Here

**Simple Sentence:** One subject-verb relationship.

✓ We talked to the supervisor this morning.

Simple sentences can contain many phrases and be very long.

✓ Yesterday afternoon at 3:00, your **dog**, tired of being cooped up all day, **dug** his way out of your yard and into mine.

Simple sentences can have more than one subject as long as they share the same verb:

✓ My **sister** and your **brother** have been dating secretly for weeks.

Simple sentences can have more than one verb as long as the verbs share the same subject:

✓ He **listened** to the radio all morning and **forgot** to study for his test.

**Compound Sentence:** Two or more separate INDEPENDENT CLAUSES connected with a comma AND coordinating (FANBOYS) conjunction or a semicolon (with or without a transitional expression):

, for , and , nor , but , or , yet , so

; moreover, ; thus, ; for example, ; consequently, ; also, ; as a result, ; however, ; for instance, ; besides, ; furthermore, ; nevertheless, ; then,

✓ **We went** to the movies last night, and **we stopped** for coffee afterward.

✓ **Jack wrote** his essay last night; however, **he forgot** to print it out.
**Complex Sentence:** One INDEPENDENT CLAUSE connected to *at least one* DEPENDENT CLAUSE:

- Although I was invited to the party, I didn’t want to go.
- We invited the neighbor to the party even though we don’t like him.

**Compound-Complex Sentence:** Two or more INDEPENDENT CLAUSES and *at least one* DEPENDENT CLAUSE:

- When we *heard* a crash outside, I *ran* to the window and Joe *called* 911.

**Exercises:** Identify the following as $S$=Simple, $Com$=Compound, $CX$=Complex, or $CC$=Compound-Complex

1. The summer has been extremely hot, but I think it’s getting cooler now.
2. Because my car has no air conditioning, I’ve been taking the bus.
3. When winter comes, we’ll all be complaining about the cold, and with my luck, my heater will break.
4. I would really love to buy a new car, maybe a Hybrid.
5. In the next five years, I will have enough money to pay off my debt.
6. Fred was concerned about his daughter’s cough; however, it turned out to be nothing serious.
7. Her alarm didn’t go off this morning because she set it for P.M. instead of A.M.