

What is a Clause? Definition, Examples of Clauses in Sentences

Clause Definition: A clause consists of a subject and a verb and is the smallest grammatical unit that expresses a thought.

What is a Clause in a Sentence?

What is a clause? In its simplest form, a clause in grammar is a subject plus a verb. The subject is the entity “doing” the action of the sentence and the verb is the action that subject completes. A clause creates a complete thought (an idea or a statement that can stand alone).

A complete thought is also called a main clause or independent clause (IC).

Examples of clauses:

- Subject + verb. = complete thought (IC)
- I eat. = complete thought (IC)
- Sharon speaks. = complete thought (IC)

A clause may include the verb predicate as well. But, it must include *at least* the subject and verb to be considered a clause.

Examples of clauses:

- Subject + verb (predicate). = complete thought (IC)
- I eat bananas. = complete thought (IC)
- Sharon speaks loudly. = complete thought (IC)

What is an Independent Clause?

Independent clause definition: An independent clause can stand alone in a sentence. It contains a subject and a verb in its smallest form. A clause may also include modifiers and a verb predicate. It is a complete thought and the smallest unit of grammar that is syntactically accurate.

Example of Independent Clauses:

- Subject + verb (predicate). = complete thought (IC)
- I eat bananas. = complete thought (IC)
- Sharon speaks loudly. = complete thought (IC)

In writing, words and modifiers can be rearranged in independent clauses to create interest.

Example of Independent Clauses:

- I eat bananas *in the kitchen*.
- *In the kitchen*, I eat.

Here, “I eat” is the subject and verb. An object (“bananas”) and a prepositional phrase (“in the kitchen”) have been added to the clause to make it more specific. The entire sentence is an independent clause because it is a complete thought statement.

What is a Dependent Clause?

Dependent clause definition: Dependent clauses contain a subject and verb. However, they cannot stand alone as an independent thought. They must be joined with an independent clause to be grammatically correct.

Example of Dependent Clause:

- *Every night before I go to bed*, I eat bananas.

This example contains the IC, “I eat bananas.” However, a dependent clause now opens the sentence. While the dependent clause contains a subject and a verb (“I go”), the dependent clause itself cannot stand alone a complete thought.