

Making Sentences – Building Blocks

To improve writing ability, it is necessary to practice building up sentences of many different patterns. Knowledge of the following will help you write more varied and interesting sentences: *phrases*; *clauses*; and *simple*, *compound* and *complex sentences*.

Simple, Compound and Complex Sentences

Simple sentences contain one clause expressing a single main idea.

For example: I went out.

I had dinner.

I went home.

I watched the television.

We often join sentences together to form compound and/or complex sentences.

Compound sentences usually contain **two or more clauses**. Each clause is independent and makes complete sense by itself.

Main Clause		Main Clause
I was sick	<i>but</i>	I refused to see a doctor
He fell ill	<i>so</i>	He had to be sent to the hospital
I finished my dinner	<i>and</i>	I watched the television

Complex sentences usually contain a **main clause and a subordinate (or dependent) clause**. The subordinate clause will not make complete sense by itself.

Main Clause	Subordinate Clause
Do not begin	<i>until</i> it is 12PM
Try not to talk	<i>while</i> you are eating
I will go ahead with the plan	<i>although</i> you do not approve of it
We are willing to help them	<i>because</i> they deserve our help.

Phrases and Clauses

Phrases are group of words which act as a unit even though it does not express a complete thought. It lacks a subject or a verb. Phrases may function as nouns, modifiers or verbs.

Phrases functioning as nouns:

My mother gave the old man a coat.

Noun Phrase

Noun Phrase

Noun Phrase

Phrases functioning as modifiers:

Adjectival Phrase (Modifying Nouns) –

The woman in red is my mother.

Adjectival Phrase

The man behind the counter gave me the change.

Adjectival Phrase

Adverbial Phrase (Modifying Verbs) –

He ran behind the moving bus.

Adverbial Phrase

Phrases functioning as verbs:

The baby has been sleeping.

Verb Phrase

The entire project will be completed.

Verb Phrase

Clauses are groups of words comprising the following elements: *subject, verb, object (optional), complement (optional), adverbial (optional)*.

Subject	Verb	Object	Complement	Adverbial
He	slept			soundly
I	bought	the watch		immediately
The Boy	felt		tired	occasionally

Phrases and **Clauses** are interchangeable. We can change **phrases** into **clauses** or **clauses** into **phrases**.

For example:

Before reaching home, he stopped to buy a drink.

Before he reached home, he stopped to buy a drink.

Seeing his friend, he waved.

When he saw his friend, he waved.

People **selling food** should keep their stalls clean.

People **who sell food** should keep their stalls clean.

The boys **chosen by the teacher** will go on the trip.

The boys **who have been chosen by the teacher** will go on the trip.

Types of Phrases

There are four main types of phrases:

- Adjectival phrase
- Adverbial phrase
- Noun phrase
- Verb phrase

Adjectival Phrase

An adjectival phrase does the work of an adjective. It describes or qualifies the noun. However, while the **adjective** comes before the noun it describes, the **adjectival phrase** comes **after** the **noun**.

The **grey-haired woman** is my grandmother.

The **woman with grey hair** is my grandmother.

The **lame man** lives here.

The **man with a limp** lives here.

Adverbial Phrase

An adverbial phrase does the work of an adverb. It modifies the verb of a sentence.

He walked behind the clump of trees.

He fell in a terrible way.

He spoke in haste.

He shouted in order to be heard.

Noun Phrase

A noun phrase does the work of a noun. It usually answers the question *what?*

He knew how to repair it.

It is only a small error.

Mr. George told us his story.

Verb Phrase

A verb phrase consist of the verb (e.g. kick, dance, run) and its helpers (e.g. shall, will, has, have, had, do, did, may, might, can, could, should, would, am, is, are, was, were, be, been).

The boat is sinking.

He is sitting for the examination today.

He will write to you.

She could have gone home.

Types of Clauses

Main Clauses

Some clauses are independent (main). They can be sentences by themselves or otherwise known as simple sentences.

The bottle was filled.
The book became a best-seller.
I stood at the bridge.
The old man fell down the stairs.
She ate the food quickly.
There was a fire in the restaurant yesterday.

Sometimes, there may be more than one clause in a sentence.

Main Clause		Main Clause
I wanted to tell her	<i>but</i>	she had left
The doctor suggested rest	<i>so</i>	we took a holiday
He really needed the money	<i>and</i>	he started working hard
It was raining	<i>but</i>	the parade went on

Subordinate Clause

However, some clauses are subordinate (dependent) ones. They are not complete sentences and they cannot stand alone.

They are usually included as sub-clauses in a main clause and they modify ideas in the main clause. They are introduced by conjunctions (e.g. *as, since, because*), or by relative pronouns (e.g. *who, which, that*).

He has no interest in ***what he is reading***.
He could not go home ***since he had missed the last bus***.

A subordinate clause can function as an adjective, an adverb or a noun. There are three kinds of subordinate clauses:

- Adverbial clause
- Adjectival (or Relative) clause
- Noun clause

Adverbial Clause

The adverbial clause does the work of an adverb; that is, it modifies the verb in the main clause. There are nine ways in which a verb can be modified. Thus, there are nine types of adverbial clause:

Adverbial clause (of):

- 1. Time
 2. Place
 3. Purpose
 4. Reason/cause
 5. Result
 6. Manner
 7. Degree/comparison
 8. Condition
 9. Concession

1. **Adverbial clause of time**

The adverbial clause of time answers the question *when*? It is frequently introduced by *when, since, as long as, before, while, until, as soon as, after*.

You must not eat **while you run**.

She left **before I could warn her**.

I have not seen Alice **since she left the university**.

That child could not walk **until he was three**.

You can stay in my house **as long as you like**.

We shall play tennis **as soon as you finish your homework**.

2. **Adverbial clause of place**

The adverbial clause of place answers the question *where*? It is frequently introduced by *where, wherever*.

Wherever he went, the film star was always recognized.

She will go **wherever her husband goes**.

You should swim **where the water is shallow**.

3. **Adverbial clause of purpose**

The adverbial clause of purpose explains what the action is expected to achieve. It is frequently introduced by *so that, in order that*.

She exercises daily **so that she can lose weight**.

Nancy works hard **in order that her family may have a better life**.

The shopkeeper reduced the prices of his goods **so that he could make a big sale**.

4. Adverbial clause of reason/cause

The adverbial clause of reason answers the question *why*? It usually begins with *because, since, as*.

He did not come to the party **because he was ill**.

She hurried to school **since she was late**.

I wore my raincoat **as it was raining**.

The thief ran away **because he saw the policeman**.

5. Adverbial clause of result

The adverbial clause of result answers the question *What was the result of the action*? It is usually indicated by *so...that*.

He is **so good that he was selected as the class president**.

They talked **so loudly that everyone heard what they said**.

He was **so ill that he looked as pale as a ghost**.

6. Adverbial clause of manner

The adverbial clause of manner answers the question *how*? It is usually introduced by *as, as if, as though*.

Please fill in the form **as you have been instructed**.

He walked **as if he was lame**.

He acted **as though he owned the place**.

7. Adverbial clause of degree/comparison

The adverbial clause of degree/comparison answers the question *how much?* and expressing a comparison. It is usually indicated by *than, as...as, far less, not as...as, less, much more*.

A computer can do any mathematical problem faster **than a man can**.

He works **as hard as I do**.

She eats **less than I do**.

Simon has **much more time to practice than Sally (has)**.

8. Adverbial clause of condition

The adverbial clause of condition tells us the condition that must be present before an action can take place. It usually begins with *if, provided that, unless, on condition that*.

If you work hard, you will achieve your ambition.

I will not go **unless my sister comes along too**.

I shall accompany you **provided that you pay your share**.

I shall take you to the concert **on condition that you help me with the work**.

9. Adverbial clause of concession

The adverbial clause of concession expresses something contrary to expectation. It is often introduced by *though, although, even if, even though*.

I will pay you **even if I have to sell my car**.

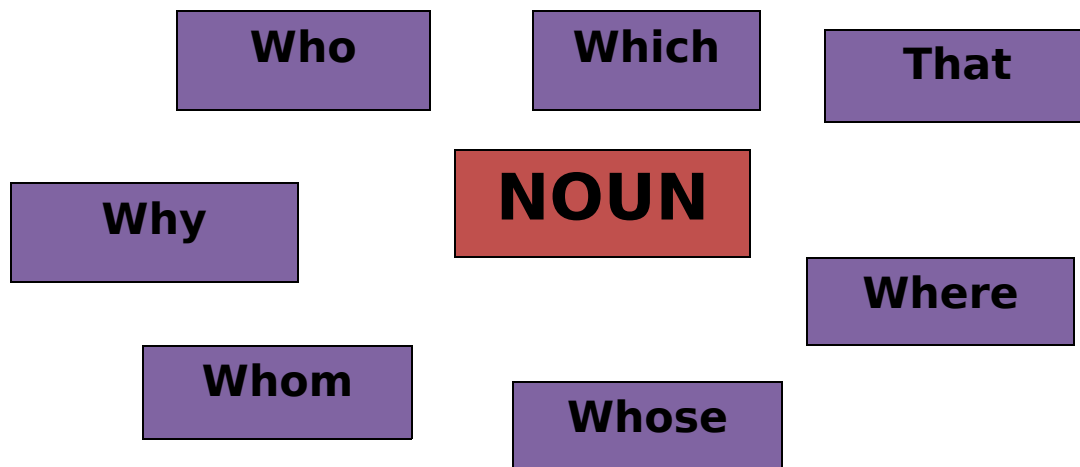
He is very fit **though he is 70 years old**.

Singapore is very well known throughout the world **even though she is only a small island**.

Although Irene was not well, she played on.

Adjectival (or Relative) Clause

An adjectival clause does the work of an adjective; that is, it tells us more about a noun in the main clause.



Miss Tan, **who teaches Geography**, lives in Woodlands.

The house **which was burnt down** is to be rebuilt.

The car **that he has just bought** is a Mercedes Benz.

This is the room **where the man was murdered**.

The man **whose wife died last year** has remarried.

The lady **whom you spoke to** is my mother.

The reason **(why) she left** is not known.

When do we use commas to separate the adjectival clause?

The adjectival clause is needed in the following sentences because it tells us which particular object we are concerned with.

The man **whom John visited last year** has passed away.

The cat **whose prey escaped** meowed continuously.

In the above examples, we do not use commas to separate the adjectival clause from the rest of the sentence.

But in the following examples, the adjectival clause contains extra information which is not really needed to complete the meaning of the

sentence. Without it, we would still know which particular thing or person we are concerned with.

Thomas, **who saved the boys**, was given a medal.

My eldest brother, **who is 25 years old**, graduated recently.

David, **who ate the stale food**, was ill.

Noun Clause

A noun clause does the work of a noun. Like a noun, it provides the answer to *What?*

Question: What did he repeat?

He repeated **jokes**. → Noun

He repeated **the joke**. → Noun Phrase

He repeated **what he said**. → Noun Clause

Question: What was interesting?

History was interesting. → Noun

The war story was interesting. → Noun Phrase

What he knew was interesting. → Noun Clause

The following table gives us different forms that a noun clause may take.

Question: What did Mr. Stevens tell you?

Main Clause	Main Clause
Mr. Stevens told us	how tired he was
	that he was tired
	who he really was
	when he would be leaving
	where he lived
	what his plans were
	whose house it was
	what we wanted to know
	which area he lived in