

COMBINING SENTENCES & PUNCTUATION

Independent Clauses vs. Dependent Clauses

Independent Clauses

Independent clauses are often called complete sentences. These types of sentences follow the minimum requirements for a sentence to be considered complete in English, meaning they have a subject and a verb present. This also means they do not need additional punctuation or information to stand on their own, which is why they are called independent.

Dependent Clauses

Dependent clauses are phrases that add extra information to an independent clause, but on their own, are not complete sentences. They usually come at the beginning or end of a complete sentence and are identified by signal words, such as the following: if, because, since, when, while, although, after, despite, before, even though, until, and more.

Combining Independent & Dependent Clauses

When combining independent and dependent clauses, they can appear in two different patterns: dependent clause first and then independent clause or independent clause first and then dependent clause. If the dependent clause comes first, a comma is needed at the end of the dependent clause right before the independent clause begins; however, if the independent clause comes first, then no comma is needed to separate them.

Analogy

To better understand the relationship between independent and dependent clauses, a parent and child analogy can be used. An independent clause is a parent; it is independent and can be on its own. However, a dependent clause is a child; it is dependent on or relies on the parent (independent clause), meaning it cannot be on its own. Also, if the dependent clause comes first, then the comma that comes after it can be thought of as a child holding a parent's hand to connect them.

Examples – Dependent Clause + Independent Clause

- When I was younger, I loved playing soccer with my friends.
- Although we had planned the trip well, we did not plan for it to rain every day.

Examples – Independent Clause + Dependent Clause

- The students finished the project after the deadline had already passed.
- I threw the milk in the trash since it expired two weeks ago.

Punctuation

In order to better understand how to combine sentences effectively, it is also important to understand how different types of punctuation work within sentences. In particular, when to use a period versus when to use a comma is often confusing for students. Below is a simplified breakdown of when to use one over the other.

Periods vs. Commas

Periods

Periods are used to end a complete thought or idea. They are oftentimes called a full stop to help show that they are the end of something someone is conveying. They can also be thought of as when you would take a breath when speaking or reading something. The pause allows the listener or reader to understand that the current thought has ended and the next one is about to begin.

Commas

Commas are used to show continuing or extra information within a sentence that can usually be separated or omitted from the main sentence. There are many different uses of commas, but the ones focused on below relate to combining sentences or creating a smooth flow within one's writing.

Dependent Clauses

Refer to the previous description in this document for more information on dependent clauses.

Examples

- When I was younger, I loved playing soccer with my friends.
- The students finished the project after the deadline had already passed.

Transitions

Transitions are words and phrases used to connect one's thoughts together to create a smooth flow. When used, they are followed by a comma.

Examples

- Also, she read over one hundred books last year.
- In contrast, I only read ten books last year.

Appositives

An appositive is a nonessential phrase or word that is inserted somewhere in a sentence, usually after a noun, to provide the reader with extra information or explanation to better understand what is trying to be conveyed. Commas are used to show where the appositive separates from the

main sentence and that if the appositive was removed, the sentence would still be grammatically correct.

Examples

- I like to buy fruit, such as apples and strawberries, from the farmer's market.
- My brother, who lives in a different state, will be visiting this summer.

Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions are used to combine two independent clauses together that are connected in their content. Most commonly, the acronym FANBOYS is used to remember the following coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. When combining two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction, a comma comes before the coordinating conjunction.

Examples

- The family sat down to eat dinner, but suddenly, there was a knock at the front door.
- Periods are used to show the end of a complete idea, and commas are used to show extra information within a sentence.

Semi-colons

Semi-colons are another type of punctuation that can be used to combine sentences. They are used to connect two independent clauses, or complete sentences, that are related to each other. The two independent clauses can be combined just with a semi-colon, or they can also be combined with a semi-colon and a transition word that helps show the relationship between the two independent clauses. Such transitions could be therefore, however, nevertheless, furthermore, moreover, etc.

Examples

- There was no time for us to finish the project by the deadline; therefore, we only submitted what we had completed to not get a late penalty on our grade.
- I like the smell of coconut; however, I do not like how it tastes.