Sentences: Independent and Dependent Clauses

The clause is the basic building block of the English sentence. All clauses must contain at least a subject (S) and a verb (V). A clause can be independent or dependent. **If it is independent, it can stand as a sentence all by itself.**

**Examples of independent clauses** include the following:

- **The cause of the problem** is not completely clear.
  
  \[
  \text{S} \quad \text{V}
  \]

- **The answer** lies in the details.
  
  \[
  \text{S} \quad \text{V}
  \]

- **The essay** has several strengths.
  
  \[
  \text{S} \quad \text{V}
  \]

**If the clause is dependent, then its meaning is not complete without the presence of an accompanying independent clause.**

Below are **examples of dependent clauses**:

- which **I will discuss** in the next section
  
  \[
  \text{S} \quad \text{V}
  \]

- **although the argument** is poorly developed
  
  \[
  \text{S} \quad \text{V} \quad \text{V}
  \]

- **after one has read** the entire essay
  
  \[
  \text{S} \quad \text{V}
  \]

- **if we examine** the author’s second argument carefully
  
  \[
  \text{S} \quad \text{V}
  \]

As previously stated, whether independent or dependent, all clauses must contain a subject and a verb. As can be seen in the above examples—the subject of a clause, whether a single word or a phrase, always has a noun or pronoun as its central element. In addition, the verb in a clause generally expresses action or existence.

In addition to subjects and verbs, the specific language you choose may make other sentence elements necessary. For example, some verbs require **direct or indirect objects**. To say someone “took” does not make sense without a direct object, or the thing that was taken. And to say someone “gave” does not usually make sense without clarifying what was given (the direct object) and to whom it was given (the indirect object).
Linking verbs, such as BE, feel, look, appear, seem, smell, and grow, are verbs which indicate current states or outcomes. Linking verbs require complements in order to complete their meanings. For example, to say something “seems” does not make sense without saying how that thing seems.

Prepositions generally precede nouns or pronouns to create adverbial or adjective phrases may be necessary in order to complete the meaning of certain verbs or adverbial expressions. For example, the verb “deal” takes on a whole new meaning when combined with the preposition “with,” and the adverbial “in spite” requires the preposition “of” in order to be used correctly.

Adjectives modify nouns or pronouns. For example, an adjective allows you to refer to a “powerful supporting point” rather than just a “supporting point.”

Adverbials words and phrases, which tell us degree, duration, frequency, manner, place, time and position, while not structurally required, may be necessary in order to express the particular meaning of the verb or adjective you want to convey. For example, to say an author “argues his point convincingly” is quite different than simply saying that he “argues his point.”

Prepositions combine with certain nouns and pronouns in order to create adverb and adjective phrases. For example in the sentence, “She uses a variety of arguments in this essay,” of arguments is an adjective phrase that modifies variety and in this essay is an adverb phrase that modifies uses.

Finally, articles may be necessary to make your sentence structurally sound. The indefinite articles a and an indicate a singular count noun, such as in the sentence, “She offered a strong set of arguments.” The definite article “the” has a variety of uses.

These include the following:

a. indicating that a noun has been previously mentioned or alluded to and is therefore specific  
   e.g. “His essay contains three flaws. The first (flaw) is its short length.

b. accompanying proper nouns e.g. “The Oxford English Dictionary offers comprehensive definitions.”

c. accompanying superlatives e.g. “This is the best argument I’ve encountered.”

This handout is adapted from the Indiana University Writing Center Website. Only the format has been changed.