Chapter 6

PHRASES, CLAUSES, AND SENTENCES

Chapter Check-In

❑ Recognizing phrases

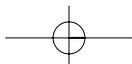❑ Identifying independent and subordinate clauses

❑ Understanding sentences

Clauses and phrases are the building blocks of sentences. A phrase is a group of words that act as a part of speech but cannot stand alone as a sentence. Clauses are groups of words that have a subject and a predicate. Independent clauses express a complete thought and can stand alone as a sentence but subordinate clauses depend on other parts of the sentence to express a complete thought.

A sentence expresses a complete thought and contains a subject, a noun or pronoun, and a predicate, a verb or verb phrase. The four basic types of sentences—simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex—use phrases and clauses in varying degrees of complexity.

The Phrase

A **phrase** is any group of related words that, unlike a sentence, has no subject-predicate combination. The words in a phrase act together so that the phrase itself functions as a single part of speech. For example, some phrases act as nouns, some as verbs, some as adjectives or adverbs. Remember that phrases can't stand alone as sentences.

The chance that you'll ever be asked to differentiate between a gerund phrase and an infinitive phrase or a participial phrase and a prepositional phrase is small. So why learn about these phrases? First, if you understand how they work, you can avoid mistaking them for sentences. Second, you can avoid misplacing them or leaving them dangling in sentences (See

Chapter 7). Third, you can learn to use them effectively in combining sentences. A series of short, choppy sentences can be turned into a more mature, effective sentence by using phrases and clauses (See Chapter 6).

The Prepositional Phrase

The most common phrase is the **prepositional phrase.** You'll find these phrases everywhere—in sentences, clauses, and even in other phrases. Each prepositional phrase begins with a preposition *(in, of, by, from, for,* etc.; see Chapter 5 for a more complete list) and includes a noun or pronoun that is the object of the preposition.

> *in* the *room*
> *of* the *people*
> *by* the *river*
> *from* the *teacher*
> *for* the *party*

The object of a preposition can have its own modifiers, which also are part of the prepositional phrase.

> in *the smoky, crowded* room
> of *the remaining few* people
> by *the rushing* river
> from *the tired and frustrated* teacher
> for *the midnight victory* party

Prepositional phrases function as either adjectives or adverbs.

> The woman *in the trench coat* pulled out her cellular phone.

The prepositional phrase here acts as an adjective describing the noun *woman.*

> Most of the audience snoozed *during the tedious performance.*

The prepositional phrase here acts as an adverb modifying the verb *snoozed.*

Phrases Containing Verbals

To understand phrases containing gerunds, infinitives and participles see Chapter 2 for a complete review of **verbals.** Briefly, these verbals act as nouns, adjectives, and adverbs in sentences.

The participial phrase

A **participial phrase** begins with a past or present participle and is followed by its objects and modifiers. Like participles alone, participial phrases are used as adjectives.

> *Sniffing the fresh air,* Jim realized he had found paradise.

In the preceding sentence, the present participle *sniffing* introduces the participial phrase, which includes the participle's object *(air)* and its modifiers *(the, fresh)*. This participial phrase acts as an adjective modifying the subject of the sentence *(Jim)*.

> The soldiers, *trapped by the enemy,* threw down their guns.

Here, the past participle *trapped* introduces the participial phrase *trapped by the enemy.* The entire phrase acts as an adjective modifying the subject of the sentence *(soldiers).* Notice the phrase-within-a-phrase here. By *the enemy* is a prepositional phrase modifying the participle *trapped.* Remember that phrases can act as modifiers in other phrases.

The gerund phrase

At first, a **gerund phrase** may look like a participial phrase because gerund phrases begin with the *-ing* form of a verb *(riding, seeing, talking,* etc.) and have objects and modifiers. But a gerund phrase always acts as a noun in a sentence, not as an adjective. Like other nouns, a gerund phrase can serve as the subject of a sentence, the object of a verb or preposition, or the complement of a linking verb.

In the following example, the gerund phrase *Riding the black stallion* acts as a noun and is the subject of the verb *terrified*.

> *Riding the black stallion* terrified Hugh.

In the next sentence, the gerund phrase *seeing the suspect* is the direct object of the verb reported. Notice that the entire phrase, not just the word *suspect,* is the direct object.

> The police officer reported *seeing the suspect.*

Here, the gerund phrase *talking often and loudly* is the object of the preposition *by.*

> The senator made his reputation by *talking often and loudly.*

In the final example, *Calling Uncle Roberto* is a gerund phrase acting as the subject of the sentence. *Asking for trouble* is a gerund phrase acting as a complement of the linking verb *is.*

> *Calling Uncle Roberto* is *asking for trouble.*

The infinitive phrase

An **infinitive phrase** contains an infinitive (for example, *to sleep, to have slept, to consider, to throw*) and its objects and modifiers. Infinitive phrases usually function as nouns, though they can be used as adjectives and adverbs.

In this sentence, *To sleep all night* is an infinitive phrase acting as a noun. It is the subject of this sentence.

> *To sleep all night* was his only wish.

Here, *To take an unpopular stand* is an infinitive phrase acting as a noun. It is the direct object of the predicate *didn't want.*

> The representatives didn't want *to take an unpopular stand.*

Next, the infinitive phrase *to spend foolishly* acts as an adjective modifying the noun *money.*

> He had plenty of money *to spend foolishly.*

In the following sentence, the infinitive phrase *to clear her mind* acts as an adverb modifying *drove.* It answers the question "Why did she drive?"

> After the confrontation, she drove miles *to clear her mind.*

Split infinitives

Breaking up an infinitive with one or more adverbs is called **splitting an infinitive.** Splitting an infinitive isn't considered the grammatical sin it used to be, but most careful writers still don't split infinitives unless they have a reason to do so.

> They taught her *to spend* money *wisely.*
> NOT They taught her *to wisely spend* money.

Sometimes, however, not splitting an infinitive is almost impossible.

> We expect the population *to more than double* over the next twenty years.

Other times, not splitting an infinitive causes ambiguity or sounds unnatural. In these cases, don't worry about breaking the old rule; clarity and smoothness take precedence over unsplit infinitives.

In this sentence, does *further* modify *Russian efforts* or *discuss?*

> We wanted *to discuss further Russian efforts* to modernize.
>
> Splitting the infinitive makes the sentence clearer.

BETTER We wanted *to further discuss Russian efforts* to modernize.

> Splitting the infinitive in the following sentence makes it less stilted, more natural.
>
> He planned *to take quickly* the children to another room.

BETTER He planned *to quickly take* the children to another room.

Types of Clauses

Like a phrase, a **clause** is a group of related words, but unlike a phrase, a clause has a subject and predicate. An **independent clause,** along with having a subject and predicate, expresses a complete thought and can stand alone as a sentence. On the contrary, a **subordinate** or **dependent clause** does not express a complete thought and therefore is *not* a sentence. A subordinate clause standing alone is the most common type of sentence fragment.

Independent clauses

He saw her; The Washingtons hurried home, Free speech has a price. Grammatically complete statements like these are sentences and can stand alone. When they are part of longer sentences, they are referred to as **independent** (or **main**) **clauses.**

Two or more independent clauses can be joined by using coordinating conjunctions *(and, but, for, nor, or, so,* and *yet)* or by using semicolons. The most important thing to remember is that an independent clause *can* stand alone as a complete sentence.

In the following example the independent clause is a simple sentence.

> *Erica brushed her long, raven hair.*

Here, the coordinating conjunction *and* joins two independent clauses:

> *Fernando left, and Erica brushed her long, raven hair.*

Here, a semicolon joins two independent clauses:

> *Fernando left; Erica brushed her long, raven hair.*

All sentences must include at least one independent clause.

> After she told Fernando to leave, *Erica brushed her long, raven hair.*

The independent clause is preceded by a clause that can't stand alone.

> *Erica brushed her long, raven hair* while she waited for Fernando to leave.

The independent clause is followed by a clause that can't stand alone.

Beginning sentences with coordinating conjunctions

Any of the coordinating conjunctions *(and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet)* can be used to join an independent clause to another independent clause. But can you *begin* a sentence with one of these conjunctions?

> No one knew what to do. *But* everyone agreed that something should be done.

An old rule says that you shouldn't. But beginning a sentence with a coordinating conjunction is widely accepted today. (Notice the preceding sentence, for example.) Sometimes beginning a sentence this way creates exactly the effect you want; it separates the clause and yet draws attention to its relationship with the previous clause. Use this technique when it works for you. If you're confronted with an advocate of the old rule, you'll have no trouble finding support for your position from the best writers and usage experts.

Subordinate clauses

A **subordinate clause** has a subject and predicate but, unlike an independent clause, cannot stand by itself. It *depends* on something else to express a complete thought, which is why it is also called a **dependent clause.** Some subordinate clauses are introduced by relative pronouns *(who, whom, that, which, what, whose)* and some by subordinating conjunctions *(although, because, if, unless, when,* etc.). Subordinate clauses function in sentences as adjectives, nouns, and adverbs.

Relative clauses

A **relative clause** begins with a relative pronoun and functions as an adjective.

In the following sentence, the relative pronoun *that* is the subject of its clause and *won* is the predicate. This clause couldn't stand by itself. Its role in the complete sentence is to modify *novel,* the subject of the independent clause.

> The novel *that won the Pulitzer Prize* didn't sell well when it was first published.

In the next example*, which* is the relative pronoun that begins the subordinate clause. *Celebrities* is the subject of the clause and *attended* is the predicate. In the complete sentence, this clause functions as an adjective describing *ceremony.*

> The ceremony, *which several celebrities attended,* received intense coverage.

Note that in a relative clause the relative pronoun is sometimes the subject of the clause, as in the following sentence, and sometimes the object, as in the next sentence.

> Arthur, *who comes to the games every week,* offered to be scorekeeper.

Who is the subject of the clause and *comes* is the predicate. The clause modifies *Arthur.*

In the following sentence*, mother* is the subject of the clause, *adored* is the predicate, and *whom* is the direct object of *adored.* Again, the clause modifies *Arthur.*

> Arthur, *whom* the team mother adored, was asked to be scorekeeper.

Noun clauses

A **noun clause** serves as a noun in a sentence.

> *What I want for dinner* is a hamburger. (subject of the predicate *is*)
> The host told us *how he escaped.* (object of the predicate *told)*
> The vacation is *what I need most.* (complement of the linking verb *is*)
> Give it to *whoever arrives first.* (object of the preposition *to*)

Pronoun case in subordinate clause

Who, whom, whoever, whomever. In deciding which case of *who* you should use in a clause, remember this important rule: The case of the pronoun is governed by the role it plays in its own clause, *not* by its relation to the rest of the sentence. Choosing the right case of pronoun can be especially confusing because the pronoun may appear to have more than one function. Look at the following sentence.

They gave the money to *whoever presented the winning ticket.*

At first, you may be tempted to think *whomever* rather than *whoever* should be the pronoun here, on the assumption that it is the object of the preposition *to.* But in fact the entire clause, not *whoever,* is the object of the preposition. Refer to the basic rule: The case should be based on the pronoun's role within its own clause. In this clause, *whoever* is the subject of the verb *presented.* (A good way to determine the right pronoun case is to forget everything but the clause itself: *whoever presented the winning ticket,* yes; *whomever presented the winning ticket,* no.)

The following two sentences show more dramatically how you must focus on the clause rather than the complete sentence in choosing the right pronoun case.

We asked *whomever we saw* for a reaction to the play.

We asked *whoever called* us to call back later.

In each sentence the clause is the direct object of asked. But in the first sentence, *whomever* is correct because within its clause it is the object of saw, while in the second sentence, *whoever* is correct because it is the subject of *called.*

Adverbial clauses

Many subordinate clauses begin with subordinating conjunctions called **adverbial clauses**. Examples of these conjunctions are *because, unless*, *if, when,* and *although.* For a more complete list, see Chapter 5. What these conjunctions have in common is that they make the clauses that follow them unable to stand alone. The clauses act as adverbs, answering questions like *how, when, where, why, to what extent,* and *under what conditions.*

While Mauna Loa was erupting and spewing fountains of lava into the air, we drove away as quickly as we could.

In the preceding sentence*, while* is a subordinating conjunction introducing the adverbial clause; the subject of the clause is *Mauna Loa* and the predicate is *was erupting* and *[was] spewing.* This clause is dependent because it is an incomplete thought. What *happened* while the volcano was erupting? The independent clause *we drove away as quickly as we could* completes the thought. The adverbial clause answers the question "When did we drive?"

In the following sentence, *because* introduces the adverbial clause in which *van* is the subject and *needed* the predicate. This clause is an incomplete thought. What *happened* because the van needed repairs? The independent

clause *The group of tourists decided to have lunch in the village* is necessary to complete the thought. Again, the subordinate clause as a whole acts as an adverb, telling why the tourists decided to have lunch in the village.

> The group of tourists decided to have lunch in the village *because the van needed repairs.*

The Sentence

The standard definition of a **sentence** is that it is a group of words containing a subject and a predicate and expressing a complete thought. But for this definition to be helpful, you must be able to recognize a subject and a predicate and understand what is meant by "a complete thought."

Subject and predicate

A sentence has a **subject** (what or whom the sentence is about) and a predicate. The **predicate** tells what the subject does or is or what is done to the subject *(*for example, The books *were left* outside). The **simple subject** is a noun or pronoun. The **complete subject** is this noun or pronoun and the words that modify it. The **simple predicate** is a verb or verb phrase (for example, *has walked, will have walked).* The **complete predicate** is the verb or verb phrase and the words that modify or complete it.

In this example*, Fred* is both the simple and the complete subject of the sentence. *Shot* is the simple predicate. *Shot Guido* is the complete predicate: the verb *shot* and its direct object *Guido.* (For direct object, see Chapter 2.)

> *Fred shot Guido.*

In the following example, *man* is the simple subject. *The angry old man in pajamas* is the complete subject. *Stood* is the verb; *stood on the porch* is the complete predicate.

> *The angry old man in pajamas stood on the porch.*

In this sentence*, The argument that money is a burden* is the complete subject. *Argument* is the simple subject modified by the adjective clause *that money is a burden.* The rest of the sentence is the complete predicate. The simple predicate is the verb *originated.*

> *The argument that money is a burden probably originated with a rich man who was trying to counter the envy of a poor man.*

In the first sentence, subject and predicate are easy to identify. In the second sentence, you can still pick out the simple subject and verb fairly easily, despite the modifiers. But the third sentence is more complicated. As

you begin to write more sophisticated sentences, the simple subject and simple predicate may seem to get lost in a web of modifying words, phrases, and clauses. To ensure that you have a complete sentence, however, you still should be able to identify the core noun or pronoun and the core verb or verb phrase.

Expressing a complete thought

In addition to having a subject and predicate, a sentence must be able to stand on its own. It can't depend on something else to express a complete thought. Look at the following examples.

> *He jumped.*

This is a grammatically complete sentence, though perhaps not an interesting one. It has a subject *(he)* and a predicate *(jumped).* It expresses a complete thought—you know what happened. You might want to know more about the person—who he is or why he jumped, for example. You might want to know more about the jump itself—when it occurred, how high it was, and so on. But the basic action is complete: *He jumped.*

The next example is an incomplete sentence. It still has a subject *(he)* and a predicate *(jumped),* but the presence of *When* keeps this group of words from being a complete thought: What *happened* when he jumped?

> *When he jumped.*

The following sentence is still an incomplete sentence. Now, you know something about where he jumped, but the thought is still incomplete: What *happened* when he jumped high into the air?

> *When he jumped high into the air.*

The next example is a complete sentence again. The question "What happened when he jumped?" has been answered: *he looked as if he were flying.* Even if the phrase *high into the air* were to be deleted, the thought would be complete.

> *When he jumped high into the air, he looked as if he were flying.*

Sentence Types: Simple, Compound, and Complex

Your ability to vary sentence types in your writing will allow you to control the pacing and clarity of your paragraphs. Using a variety of sentence types also makes for more interesting reading.

A **simple sentence** has one independent clause and no subordinate clauses.

> *Old-growth forests in the United States are disappearing.*
>
> *Citizens must act.*

A **compound sentence** has two or more independent clauses, joined by coordinating conjunctions, and no subordinate clauses.

> *Old-growth forests in the United States are disappearing, and citizens must act.* (two independent clauses joined by *and*)

A **complex sentence** contains one independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses.

> *Because old growth forests in the United States are fast disappearing, citizens must act now. (Because old growth forests in the United States are fast disappearing* = subordinate clause beginning with subordinating conjunction; *citizens must act now* = independent clause)
>
> *Forests that have existed for thousands of years are in danger.* (*that have existed for thousands of years* = subordinate clause beginning with relative pronoun; *Forests . . . are in danger* = independent clause)

A **compound-complex sentence** joins two or more independent clauses with one or more subordinate clauses.

> *Forests that have existed for thousands of years are in danger, and citizens must take action.* (*Forests are in danger* and *citizens must take action* = independent clauses; *that have existed for thousands of years* = subordinate clause)

Make use of all these types of sentences. Don't string together a long series of simple sentences, but, on the other hand, don't always write compound and complex sentences. Try beginning with a simple sentence, or try following several long compound and complex sentences with a simple one. It can have a surprisingly forceful effect.

> Because America seemed to provide limitless natural resources, until the second half of this century we spent them freely. We mined for minerals, diverted rivers, and cut down trees, many of which had been growing for thousands of years before the first settlers arrived. Over the years, America's wilderness has given way to prosperous cities, and skyscrapers have replaced giant old trees. *America has succeeded. But now we are paying the price.*

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Chapter Checkout

Q&A

1. Identify the following underlined phrases as prepositional phrase, participial phrase, gerund phrase, or infinitive phrase.

    a. <u>Dreaming about mice</u> is my cat Mocha's favorite hobby.
    b. Kevin wants <u>to make</u> the world a better place.
    c. <u>Lying on his bed</u>, Richard felt better.
    d. Ted sneezed <u>in church.</u>
    e. Dr. Tucker planned <u>to have read</u> that book.

2. Identify the function of the underlined dependent clauses.

    a. <u>When my father called from Israel</u>, Mother threw down her knitting and hurried to answer the phone.
    b. The prom, <u>which is usually held in May</u>, was delayed by the late snowstorm.
    c. <u>Whoever adjusted my seat</u> must have been tall.

3. True or False: All of the following are independent clauses.

    a. Sherry smiled.
    b. The Russian impressionist collection, with all their dramatic colors and themes.
    c. To have been loved is to have known joy and pain

4. Underline the complete subject in the following sentences.

    a. My cousin Andy, a shy man, was married last summer.
    b. The office will be closed on Thursday.
    c. Get ready!

5. Underline the complete predicate in the following sentences.

    a. Through the quiet, dark streets came Lizz, determined not to get lost.
    b. After a deep winter sleep, the bears emerged hesitantly.
    c. Andrei visited the Grand Canyon last summer.

Answers: 1. a. gerund b. infinitive c. participial d. prepositional e. infinitive. 2. a. Adverb b. Adjective c. Noun. 3. a. True b. False c. True. 4. a. My cousin Andy, a shy young man b. The office c. You (implied subject). 5. a. Through the quiet, dark streets came, determined not to get lost b. After a deep winter sleep, emerged hesitantly c. visited the Grand Canyon last summer.