

BHARAT SCHOOL OF BANKING – VELLORE-1
PHRASES AND CLAUSES

Clauses and Phrases

To understand punctuation, it is helpful to understand the difference between a **phrase** and a **clause**.

I. A phrase is a collection of words that may have nouns or verbals, but it does not have a subject doing a verb. The following are examples of phrases:

- leaving behind the dog
- smashing into a fence
- before the first test
- after the devastation
- between ignorance and intelligence
- broken into thousands of pieces
- because of her glittering smile

In these examples above, you will find **nouns** (dog, fence, test, devastation, ignorance, intelligence, thousands, pieces). You also have some **verbals** (leaving, smashing), but in no case is the noun functioning as a subject doing a predicate verb. They are all phrases.

II. A clause is a collection of words that has a subject that is actively doing a verb. The following are examples of clauses:

- since she laughs at diffident men
- I despise individuals of low character
- when the saints go marching in

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- Obediah Simpson is uglier than a rabid raccoon
- because she smiled at him.

In the examples above, we find either a noun or a pronoun that is a **subject** (bold-print and red) attached to a predicate verb (underlined and purple) in each case:

- since **she** laughs at diffident men
- **I** despise individuals of low character
- when the **saints** go marching in
- **Obediah Simpson** is uglier than a rabid raccoon
- because **she** smiled at him

III. If the clause could stand by itself, and form a complete sentence with punctuation, we call the clause an **independent clause**. The following are independent clauses:

- **I** despise individuals of low character
- **Obediah Simpson** is uglier than a rabid raccoon

We could easily turn independent clauses into complete sentences by adding appropriate punctuation marks. We might say, "I despise individuals of low character." Or we might write, "Obediah Simpson is uglier than a rabid raccoon!" We call them *independent* because these types of clauses can stand *independently* by themselves, without any extra words attached, and be complete sentences.

IV. Dependent clauses have a subject doing a verb, but they have a subordinate conjunction placed in front of the clause. That subordinate conjunction means that the clause can't stand independently by itself and become a complete sentence. Instead,

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the dependent clause is *dependent* upon another clause--it can't make a complete sentence by itself, even though it has a subject doing a verb. Here are some examples of dependent clauses:

- since **she** laughs at diffident men
- when the **saints** go marching in
- because **she** smiled at him

These clauses simply do not form complete thoughts or sentences by themselves. Those subordinate conjunctions--*since*, *when*, and *because*--cause the listener to expect some extra material. The thought is incomplete. If you walked up to a friend in the dorms and said, "since she laughs at diffident men," and then walked away without adding an independent clause, the friend would be completely baffled.

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