

The background features a diagonal line from the top-left to the bottom-right. The area above and to the left of this line is divided into several geometric sections: a dark purple triangle with a white dot and a thin white line extending from it; a blue square containing a grey semi-circle and concentric blue circles; a pink square with a pattern of parallel pink lines; a pink square with a pattern of parallel white lines; a grey triangle; and a dark purple triangle. The area below and to the right of the diagonal line is a solid blue background.

# CLAUSES

# INTRODUCTION TO CLAUSES

A clause is a grammatical unit which operates at a lower level than the sentence but at a higher level than words or phrases. It is sometimes helpful to think of the clause as a building block for sentences, helping to develop and expand the sentence as necessary. The verb is a key constituent of a clause. So a clause could consist of:

A clause can be a sentence in its own right as in all the examples above, but more often it is a part of a sentence, as in the examples below (finite verbs are underlined):

- I wandered lonely as a cloud [that floats on high o'er vale and hill.](#)
- It is a truth universally acknowledged, [that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.](#)
- Either date is fine by me, [but I would prefer the 2nd November if it fits in with your schedule appropriately.](#)

Traditional grammars used to define a clause as a block of words containing a subject and a finite verb. Indeed, many clauses do follow this pattern and initially, you might find it easier to identify clauses by establishing where the finite verbs are in a sentence, and locating the clause which is built upon each of the finite verbs.

- However, it is important to remember that not all clauses contain a finite verb and non-finite clauses are a common occurrence in both speech and writing.
- Clauses can be coordinate or subordinate, each playing a different role within a sentence.

One word	<b>Eat!</b>
Two words	<b>Sally wept.</b>
Three words	<b>I think so</b>
and so on.	

# DEFINE AND CLASSIFY

Learning the various terms used to define and classify clauses can be a vocabulary lesson in itself. This digital handout categorizes clauses into **independent** and **dependent clauses**. This simply means that some clauses can stand by themselves, as separate sentences, and some can't. Another term for dependent clause is **subordinate clause**: this means that the clause is subordinate to another element (the independent clause) and depends on that other element for its meaning. The subordinate clause is created by a **subordinating conjunction** or **dependent word**.

An independent clause, "She is older than her brother" (which could be its own sentence), can be turned into a dependent or subordinate clause when the same group of words begins with a dependent word (or a subordinating conjunction in this case): "Because she is older than her brother, she tells him what to do."

Clauses are also classified as **restrictive** and **nonrestrictive clauses**. (The words **essential** and **nonessential** are sometimes used and mean the same thing as **restrictive** and **nonrestrictive**, respectively. British grammarians will make this same distinction by referring to clauses with the terms **defining** and **non-defining**.) A nonrestrictive clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence; it can be removed from the sentence without changing its basic meaning. Nonrestrictive clauses are often set apart from the rest of the sentence by a comma or a pair of commas (if it's in the middle of a sentence).

Professor Villa, who used to be a secretary for the President, can type 132 words a minute.

# INTRODUCTION TO CLAUSES

**Independent Clauses** could stand by themselves as discrete sentences, except that when they do stand by themselves, separated from other clauses, they're normally referred to simply as sentences, not clauses. The ability to recognize a clause and to know when a clause is capable of acting as an independent unit is essential to correct writing and is especially helpful in avoiding sentence fragments and run-on sentences.. Needless to say, it is important to learn how to combine independent clauses into larger units of thought. In the following sentence, for example:

Bob didn't mean to do it, but he did it anyway.

We have two independent clauses, "Bob didn't mean to do it" and "he did it anyway", connected by a comma and a coordinating conjunction ("but"). If the word "but" is missing from this sentence, the sentence would be called a comma splice: two independent clauses would be incorrectly connected, smashed together, with only a comma between them. Furthermore, a long series of clauses of similar structure and length begins to feel monotonous, leading to what is called "Dick and Jane" or primer language (after the kind of prose that we find in first-grade textbooks or "primers").

Clauses are combined in three different ways: coordination, subordination, and by means of a semicolon. **Coordination** involves joining independent clauses with one of the coordinating conjunctions: and, but, or, nor, for, yet, and sometimes\* so. Clauses thus connected are usually nicely balanced in length and import.

Ramonita thought about joining the church choir, but she never talked to her friends about it.

# SUBORDINATION

**Subordination** involves turning one of the clauses into a subordinate element (one that cannot stand on its own) through the use of a **Subordinating Conjunction** (sometimes called a dependent word) or a **Relative Pronoun**. When the clause begins with a subordinating word, it is no longer an independent clause; it is called a dependent or subordinate clause because it depends on something else (the independent clause) for its meaning. There are other ways of combining ideas " by turning independent clauses into various kinds of modifying **phrases**.

- **Although** Ramonita often thought about joining the choir, she never talked to her friends about it.

- Ramonita never talked to her friends about joining the choir, **because** she was **afraid** they would make fun of her.

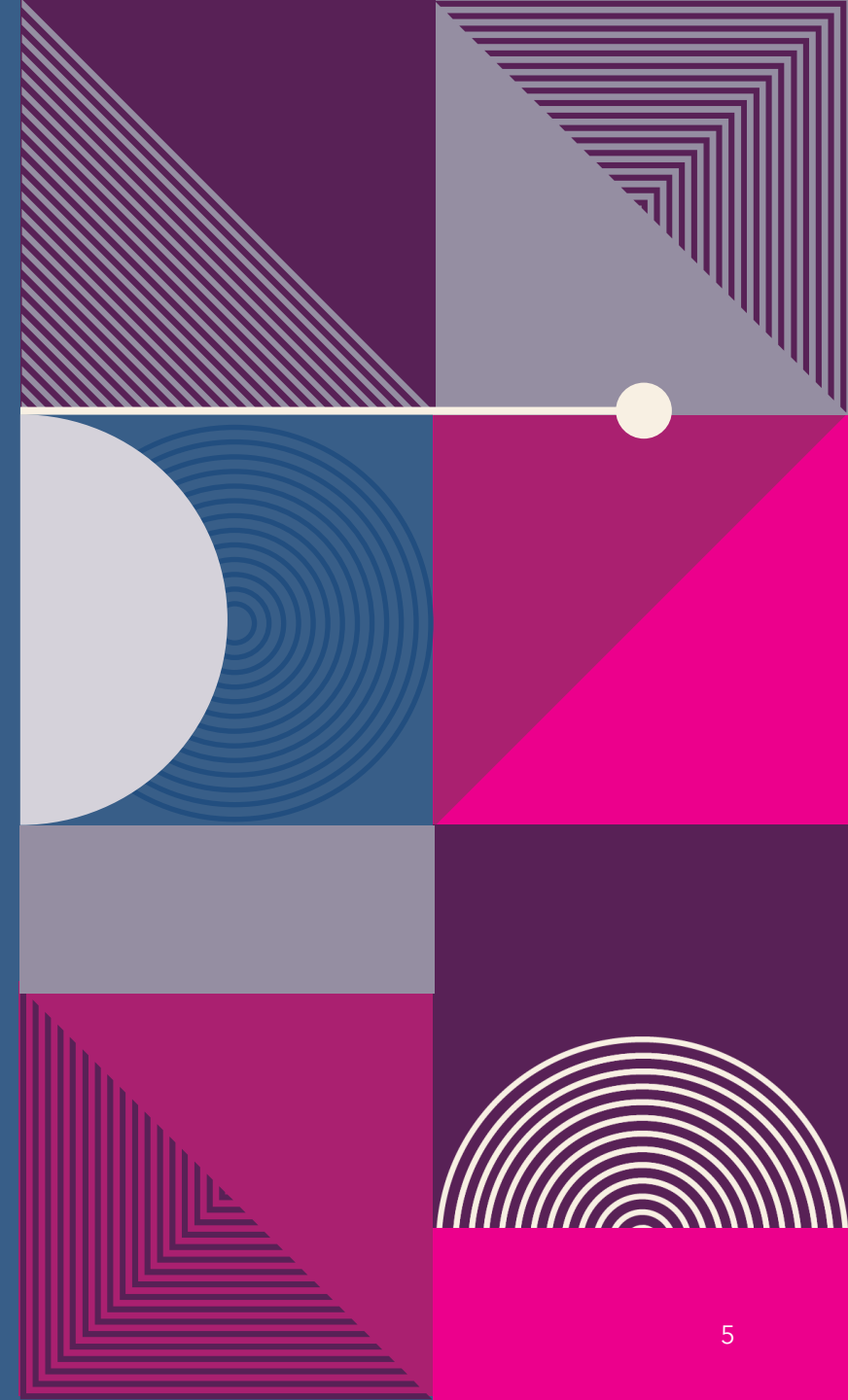
- Yasmin is Ramonita's sister. Yasmin told Ramonita to join the choir no matter what her friends said.

Joining these with the use of a relative clause:

Yasmin, [**who** is] Ramonita's sister, told Ramonita to join the choir. . . .

**Semicolons** can connect two independent clauses with or without the help of a **conjunctive adverb (transitional expression)**. Semicolons should be used sparingly and only when the two independent clauses involved are closely related and nicely balanced in terms of length and import.

Ramonita has such a beautiful voice; many couples have asked her to sing at their wedding.  
Ramonita's voice has a clear, angelic quality; furthermore, she clearly enjoys using it.



# DEPENDENT CLAUSES

**Dependent Clauses** cannot stand by themselves and make good sense. They must be combined with an independent clause so that they become part of a sentence that can stand by itself. (Review the section on [Commas Usage](#) for advice and plenty of exercises on the punctuation requirements when dependent and independent clauses are combined.)

Unlike independent clauses, which simply are what they are, dependent clauses are said to perform various functions within a sentence. They act either in the capacity of some kind of noun or as some kind of modifier. There are three basic kinds of dependent clauses, categorized according to their function in the sentence. Remember that a dependent clause always contains a subject and a verb, but it cannot stand by itself.

- **Adverb clauses** provide information about what is going on in the main (independent) clause: where, when, or why. "When the movie is over, we'll go downtown." or "John wanted to write a book because he had so much to say about the subject."

- **Adjective clauses** work like multi-word adjectives. "My brother, who is an engineer, figured it out for me." or "The bridge that collapsed in the winter storm will cost millions to replace." A special kind of adjective clause begins with a [relative adverb](#) (where, when, and why) but nonetheless functions as adjectivally.

- **Noun clauses** can do anything that nouns can do. "What he knows [subject] is no concern of mine." or "Do you know what he knows [object]?" or "What can you tell me about what he has done this year [object of the preposition "about"]?"

# DEPENDENT CLAUSES CONT.

## Noun Clause as Subject

*What they did with the treasure* remains a mystery.  
*Whatever you want for dessert* is fine with me.  
*That you should feel this way about her* came as a great surprise to us.

## Noun Clause as Object

Juan finally revealed *what he had done with the money*.  
Her husband spent *whatever she had saved over the years*.  
I don't know *what I should do next*.

## Noun Clause as Object of Preposition

In fact, he wrote a book about *what he had done over the years*.  
We are interested in *what he does for a living*.

## Noun Clause as Predicate Nominative

The trouble was *that they had never been there before*.  
The biggest disappointment of last season was *that the women's team didn't make it to the final four*.

## Adjective Clause

My brother, *who now teaches math at a small college*, never liked math in high school.  
The dealership *that sold more cars* ended up actually losing money.  
The Federated Bank, *which was founded nearly two centuries ago*, folded during the state's economic crisis.

## Adverb Clause

The team had fallen behind by ten points *before they were able to figure out the opponent's defense*.  
*Since he started working nights*, he doesn't see much of his kids.  
*While Josie sat inside watching television*, Gladys shoveled the driveway.

# COORDINATE CLAUSES

Co-ordinated clauses are pairs of clauses linked by a coordinating conjunction, such as **but** or **and**. The conjunction joins part of the sentence which has equal status: neither is more important than the other. One way to visualize this is to think of co-ordinated clauses as being like weighing scales: each clause exactly balances the other.

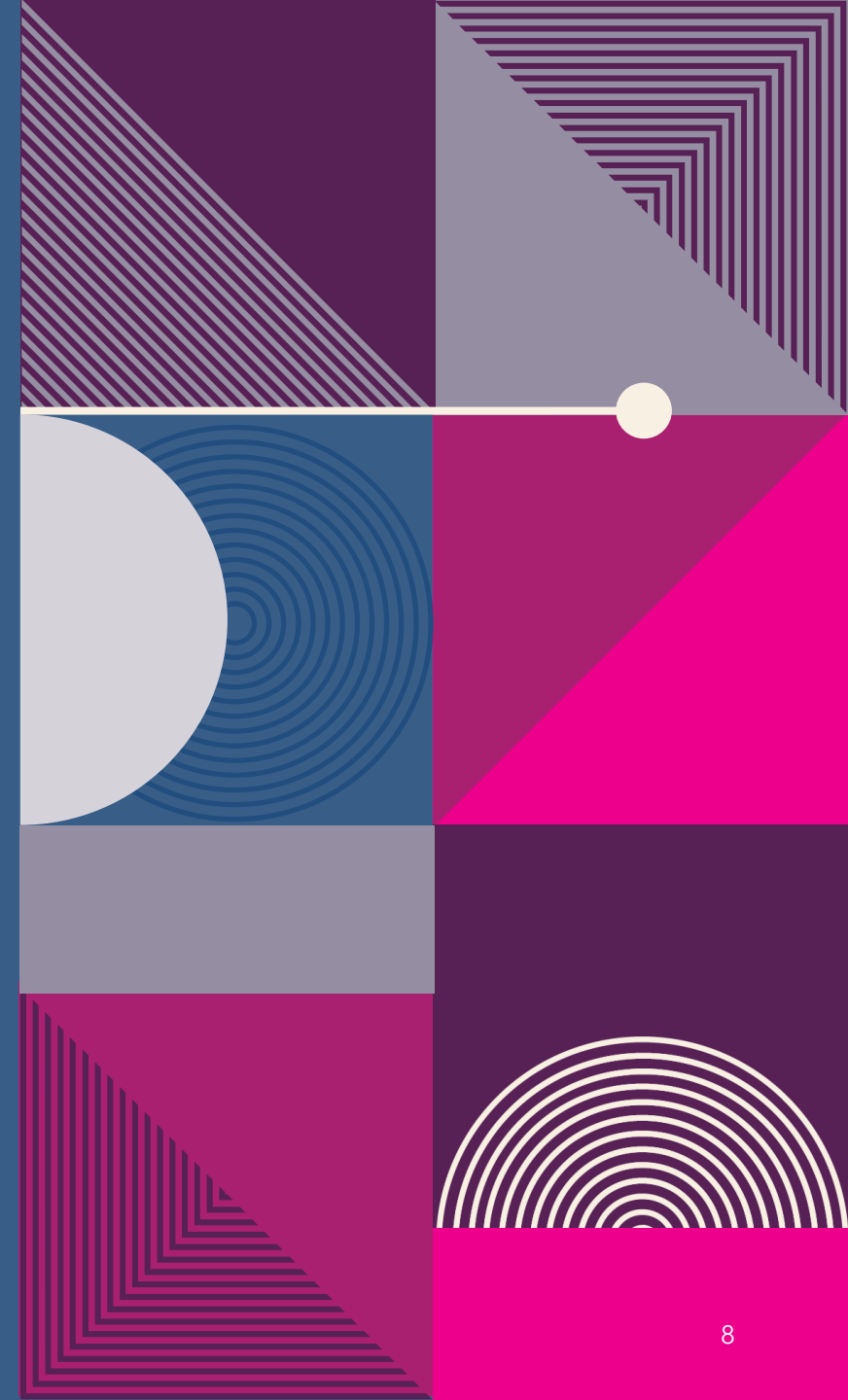
Look at these examples of co-ordinated clauses taken from 'Captain Corelli's **Mandolin**'. (The finite verbs are underlined in green and the coordinating conjunction is in red.)

Hector laughed **and** so Mandras laughed also. He dropped to his knees **and** went over to her on all fours.

The doctor winced **and** shook his head, **and** Psipsina went to the door **and** scratched at it

They always had colds, **but** were capable of incredible endurance, **and** they made incomprehensible jokes...

Look at the way each of these co-ordinated clauses relates to the others in the sentence, the way they balance each other. Note also how easy it would be to remove the coordinating conjunction and rewrite each sentence as several separate sentences. This is another feature of co-ordinated clauses: each clause is capable of standing on its own as a separate, independent sentence.





# RELATIVE CLAUSES

**Relative clauses** are dependent clauses introduced by a **Relative Pronoun** (that, which, whichever, who, whoever, whom, whomever, whose, and of which). Relative clauses can be either restrictive or nonrestrictive. Review the section on **Comma Usage** for additional help in determining whether relative clauses are restrictive or nonrestrictive (parenthetical or not) and whether commas should be used to set them off from the rest of the sentence. In a relative clause, the relative pronoun is the subject of the verb (remember that all clauses contain a subject-verb relationship) and refers to (relates to) something preceding the clause.

Giuseppe said **that the plantar wart**, which had been bothering him for years, **had to be removed**.

(In this sentence, the clause **in this color** is a restrictive [essential] clause [a noun clause " see below] and will not be set off by a comma; the underlined relative clause [modifying "wart"] is nonrestrictive [nonessential " it can be removed from the sentence without changing the meaning of the sentence] and is set off by commas.)

Some relative clauses will refer to more than a single word in the preceding text; they can modify an entire clause or even a series of clauses.

Charlie didn't get the job in administration, which really surprised his friends.

Charlie didn't get the job in administration, and he didn't even apply for the Dean's position, which really surprised his friends.

A relative clause that refers to or modifies entire clauses in this manner is called a **sentential clause**. Sometimes the "which" of a sentential clause will get tucked into the clause as the determiner of a noun:

Charlie might very well take a job as headmaster, in which case the school might as well close down.

# COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

- There are relatively few co-ordinating conjunctions, and being by far the most common. Below are some of the more commonly used.
- Remember that coordinating conjunctions will also co-ordinate words which are not clauses, such as coordinating two adjectives (**a red and shiny nose**) or two nouns (**apples and pears**). To determine if the conjunction is co-ordinating two clauses look for the finite verb in each clause.
- Sometimes using and would be too clumsy and repetitive, so a comma is used instead to separate a string of co-ordinated clauses. This is particularly a feature of lists of clauses and in each case, it would always be possible to insert the word and to replace the comma (though with infelicitous consequences!). The opening to Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities offers a good example of this:
  - *It was the best of times, it **was** the worst of times, it **was** the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it **was** the epoch of belief, it **was** the epoch of incredulity...*

<i>and</i>	<i>or</i>
<i>and so</i>	<i>yet</i>
<i>and then</i>	<i>neither...n or..'</i>
<i>but</i>	<i>not only...but also</i>

# SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

Subordinate clauses are those which, as their name implies, are less important than or subordinate to another clause. Subordinate clauses are dependent upon a main clause and cannot stand alone as independent units or separate sentences. One way to visualize this is to think of a tractor and trailer. The tractor is the main clause - it has the power and can operate on its own without the trailer. The trailer is the subordinate clause - it needs to be attached to the tractor and when detached it cannot move.

He moved to Paris **where He earned a living by telling fortunes**

I always kiss him like that **when he comes in.**

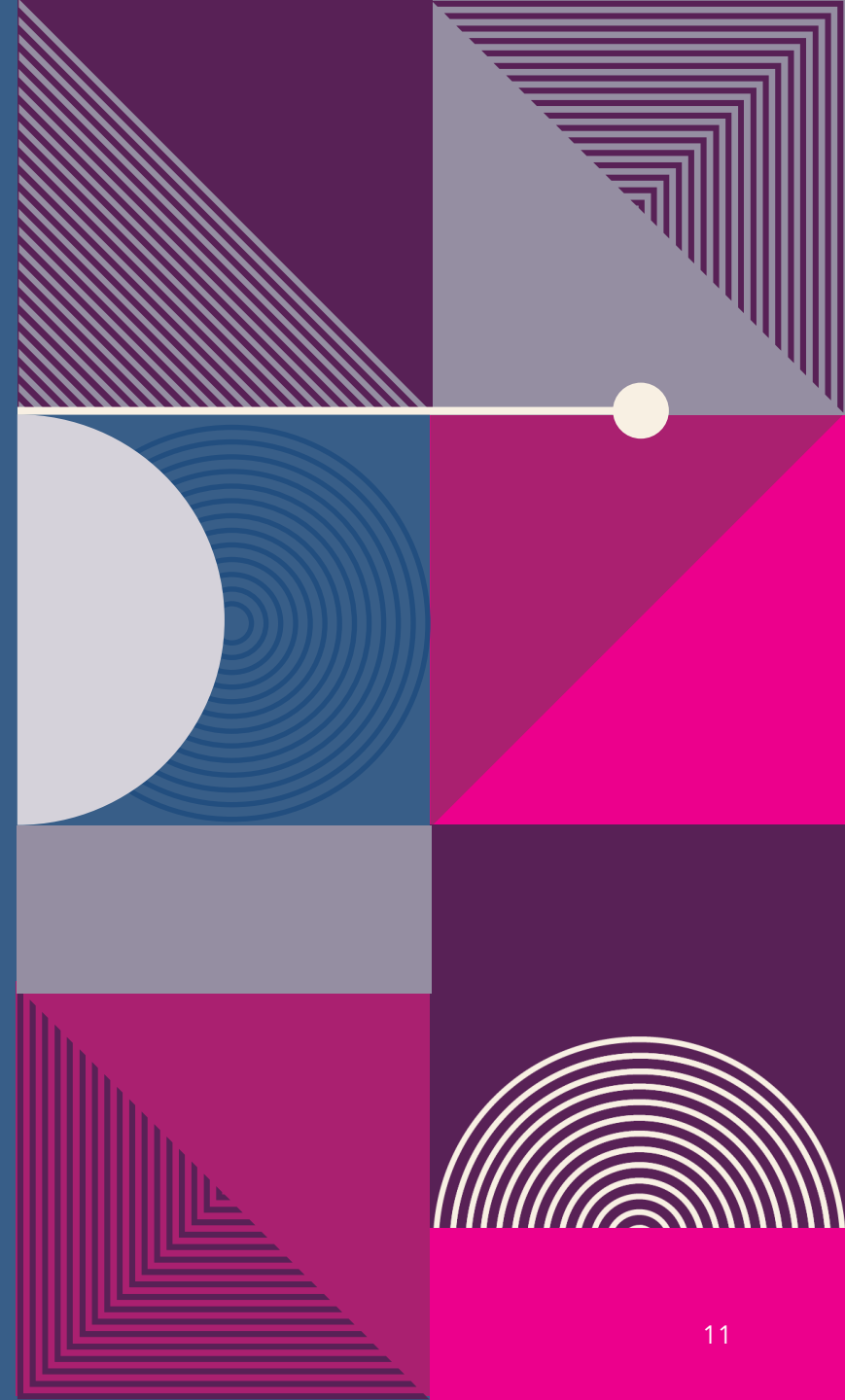
Corelli was indistinguishable from the wet sand **because he was perfectly covered in it.**

As he talked **he enumerated his points on his fingers.**

Note that because the subordinate clause is dependent upon the main clause does not mean it has to follow the main clause. In the last example above, the subordinate clause precedes the main clause and this is a common structure.

## Subordinators:

Subordinate clauses can be formed using subordinating conjunctions or by using relative pronouns (that, who, whose, which, ). There is a wide range of subordinators, expressing a rich variety of meanings. Some of them are listed in the box below.



# SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CONT.

<i>Because</i>	<i>until</i>
<i>When</i>	<i>although</i>
<i>Where</i>	<i>since</i>
<i>Why</i>	<i>as</i>
<i>Unless</i>	<i>after</i>
<i>If</i>	<i>while</i>
<i>in order to</i>	<i>rather than</i>