

Sentence, Phrase & Clause

Difference between a Sentence, a Clause and a Phrase

What do you understand by the words **SENTENCE**, **CLAUSE** and **PHRASE**?

Sentence

A **Sentence** is a **group of words that makes complete sense**. It does not depend upon anything else to make its meaning clear.

For example:

Raju hit the ball.

Here, the individual words 'Raju' 'hit' 'the' 'ball' combine to form a group that has a particular meaning—*someone named Raju has hit the ball*.

A sentence consists of two parts—**subject** and **predicate**. The subject of a sentence is **the person, place, thing or idea being talked about**. The predicate consists of a word or words which show **what is being talked about the person, place, thing or idea**.

Let us take the previous example:

[Raju] [hit the ball.]

Here, 'Raju' is the subject. He is the **topic of the sentence**. The remaining part of the sentence forms the predicate as it contains all the **information regarding the topic** (i.e., Raju).

Clause

A **Clause** is a **group of words containing a subject and a predicate**. There are broadly two types of clauses:

Those that **can stand alone and make their meaning clear**, and

Those that **cannot stand alone and make complete sense**

The first category of clauses is called **Independent**, while the second is known as **Dependent**.

Remember: *Every independent clause is a sentence by itself.*

For example:

Anjali was watching television while her brother was sleeping.

This sentence can be broken into two clauses as follows:

Anjali was watching television. (**CLAUSE 1**)

(Here, 'Anjali' is the subject and 'is watching television' is the predicate.)

While her brother was sleeping (**CLAUSE 2**)

(Here, 'her brother' is the subject and 'was sleeping' is the predicate.)

Clause 1 makes its meaning clear when it stands alone—*someone named Anjali was watching television*.

However, clause 2 is not able to do so. The presence of 'while' prevents it from making complete sense. It is dependent on clause 1 for its meaning.

Remember: *A dependent clause is begun by a subordinating conjunction or a relative pronoun.*

The Subject and Predicate of a Sentence

The Subject of a Sentence

The subject of a sentence is a noun, pronoun or a group of words that acts as a noun.

A noun, as you know, is a person, place, thing or idea.

For example:

Geeta moved the **table**.

('Geeta' is the name of a person and 'table' is a thing.)

Paris is in **France**.

('Paris' and 'France' are names of places.)

Freedom is good.

('Freedom' is an idea.)

A pronoun is used in place of a noun.

For example:

She moved the table.

It is in France.

It is good.

('She' and 'it' are examples of pronouns.)

Sometimes a group of words can also act as the noun.

For example:

To play professional tennis is my ambition.

(Here, 'to play professional tennis' is a group of words that acts as a noun. It is the subject of the sentence.)

The Predicate of a Sentence

The predicate of a sentence is composed of a verb, and either an object or a complement.

A verb, as you know, describes the action performed by its subject or the state of being of its subject.

For example:

Balram **kicked** the football.

(Here, 'kicked' is the verb that shows the action performed by the subject 'Balram'.)

Prachi **seems** happy.

(Here, 'seems' is the verb that shows the state of being of the subject 'Prachi'.)

In the last two examples, the predicate is composed of different elements.

In the first case, the predicate is composed of the verb and the object. What is this object? The object is the person or thing upon which the action is performed by the subject.

So,

Balram = **Subject**

Kicked the football = **Predicate**

Another way to express this is,

Balram = **Subject**

Kicked = **Verb**

The football = **Object**

Note: Like the subject, the object can be a noun, a pronoun or a group of words acting as a noun.

In the second case, the predicate is composed of the verb and the complement. What is this complement? The complement gives more information about the subject.

So,

Prachi = **Subject**

Seems happy = **Predicate**

Another way of writing this would be,

Prachi = **Subject**

Seems = **Verb**

Happy = **Complement**

Note: The complement can be a noun, an adjective or a group of words acting as a noun or an adjective.

Purposes of Sentences

On the basis of purpose, sentences can be divided as follows:

Declarative Sentences

A declarative sentence **makes some sort of declaration or statement.**

For example:

The service in that hotel is fantastic.

Here, the speaker of this sentence is making an assertion or stating a fact—*the service in a particular hotel is really good.*

Interrogative Sentences

An interrogative sentence **asks a question.**

For example:

Is Yudhishtir going to school?

Here, the speaker of this sentence is asking something—*whether Yudhishtir is going to school.*

Imperative Sentences

An imperative sentence **makes a request or gives a command.**

For example:

Open the door.

Please hold the bag for me.

In the first sentence, the speaker is commanding someone to do something—*open the door.*

In the second sentence, the speaker is requesting someone to do something—*hold the bag.*

Exclamatory Sentences

An exclamatory sentence **expresses some strong feeling or emotion.**

For example:

Oh no! My new dress is ruined!

Here, the speaker of this sentence is exclaiming her disappointment over something—*new dress is ruined*.

Purposes of Phrases

Within different sentences, phrases perform different roles. They can:

(a) Act as nouns: A noun is a person, place, thing or idea. Like a noun, a phrase working as a noun answers the questions *what* and *who*.

Also, like a noun, a phrase working as a noun can be the subject or object of a sentence.

[I] [saw] [a ghost in the bed.]

Here, 'a ghost in the bed' is the object of the action ('saw') performed by the subject ('I'). An object can only be a noun or a pronoun. Hence, in this sentence, the phrase is performing the role of a noun.

(b) Act as adjectives: An adjective describes or modifies a noun or a pronoun. Like an adjective, a phrase working as an adjective answers the question *which* and *of what kind*.

[My room] [is] [full of books.]

Here, 'full of books' is the complement of the verb ('is'). The complement tells us about the subject ('My room'). When you ask the question '*What kind* of room is it?', you get the answer 'it is *full of books*'. Hence, in this sentence, the phrase is performing the role of an adjective.

(c) Act as adverbs: An adverb describes a verb, an adjective or another adverb. Like an adverb, a phrase working as an adverb answers the questions *how*, *how much*, *how often*, *when*, *where* and *why*.

[The boy] [ran] [**into the house.**]

Here, 'into the house' is describing the verb ('ran'). When you ask the question 'ran *where?*', you get the answer 'into the house'. Hence, in this sentence, the phrase is performing the role of an adverb.

Purposes of Clauses

Dependent clauses can perform different functions in different sentences. They can:

Act as nouns

I know that you want to sleep.

I know. **(Main Clause)**

That you want to sleep **(Dependent Clause)**

Here, the dependent clause acts as the complement of the verb 'know'. You can ask the question 'I know *what?*' and get the answer 'that *you want to sleep*'. Hence, in this sentence, the dependent clause acts as a noun.

Act as adverbs

She reads newspaper because she wants to improve her general knowledge.

She reads newspaper.

(Main Clause)

Because she wants to improve her general knowledge

(Dependent Clause)

Here, the dependent clause describes the verb 'reads'. When you ask the question 'reads newspaper *why?*', you get the answer 'to *improve her general knowledge*'. Hence, in this sentence, the dependent clause acts as an adverb.

Act as adjectives

As an adjective, a dependent clause can be either restrictive or non-restrictive.

A restrictive clause provides essential information about the noun that it describes.

A non-restrictive clause provides additional information about the noun that it describes.

He who completes his work on time will get the chocolate.

He will get the chocolate.

(Main Clause)

Who completes his work on time

(Dependent Clause that is Restrictive)

Here, the dependent clause describes the pronoun 'he'. It acts as an adjective. It is also essential for identifying the pronoun. It is important to know the 'he' that will get the chocolate. It will be the 'he' who completes his work on time. The sentence would not mean the same in the absence of the dependent clause. Hence, it is restrictive.

Remember: *Do not use commas to separate the restrictive clause from the main clause.*

Ritu, who is considered a dynamic personality by her friends, was chosen as the Indian Ambassador to Canada.

Ritu was chosen as the Indian Ambassador to Canada.

(Main Clause)

Who is considered a dynamic personality by her friends

(Dependent Clause that is Non-restrictive)

Here, the dependent clause describes the noun 'Ritu'. It acts as an adjective, but it is not essential for identifying the noun. The sentence would mean the same even in its absence. Hence, it is non-restrictive.

Remember: *Use commas to separate the non-restrictive clause from the main clause.*

Structure of a Sentence

Simple Sentences

A simple sentence **has only a single independent clause.**

For example:

My toy is broken.

Compound Sentences

A compound sentence is **made up of two or more independent clauses, joined by a coordinating conjunction.**

For example:

The passage was dark, so we could not see anything.

This sentence can be broken up into two independent clauses as follows:

The passage was dark. **(INDEPENDENT CLAUSE 1)**

We could not see anything. **(INDEPENDENT CLAUSE 2)**

These clauses are joined by the coordinating conjunction 'so'.

Complex Sentences

A complex sentence is **made up of an independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. Each dependent clause begins with a subordinating conjunction or a relative pronoun.**

For example:

I have to leave early because I have to meet someone.

This sentence can be broken up into two clauses as follows:

I have to leave early. **(INDEPENDENT CLAUSE)**

Because I have to meet someone **(DEPENDENT CLAUSE)**

The independent clause can stand by itself and make its meaning clear.

However, the dependent clause—beginning with the subordinating conjunction 'because'— cannot stand on its own and make complete sense. Since it begins with a subordinating conjunction, it is dependent upon the independent clause.