

# CRASH COURSE: GRAMMAR

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# WHAT IN THE WORLD IS A CLAUSE?

## Clause

A clause is a group of related words that are used as a part of a sentence. A clause contains a subject and a verb and can either stand on its own or not.

## Phrase

A Phrase contains either a subject **OR** a verb, but does not usually have both. Phrases cannot stand on their own!

## Independent Clause:

A complete thought - can stand on its own - A simple sentence.

**Example(s):** She likes dogs.

He plays hockey.

You must work hard.

## Dependent Clause:

Not a complete thought does not stand on its own. When a dependent clause is by itself, it is a fragment - not a sentence.

**Example(s):** as she walked

because she was late

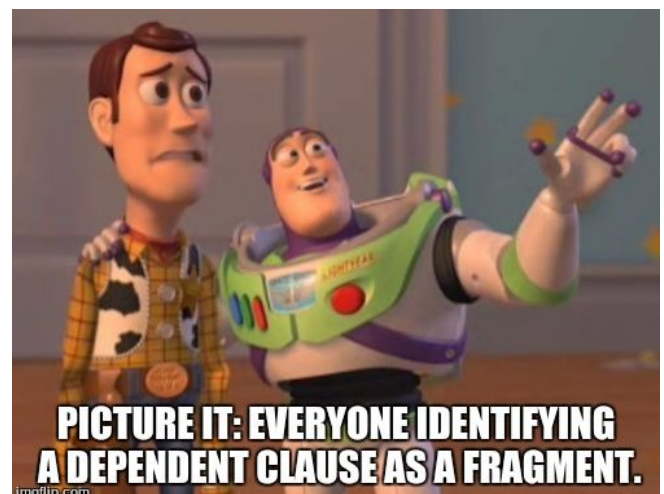
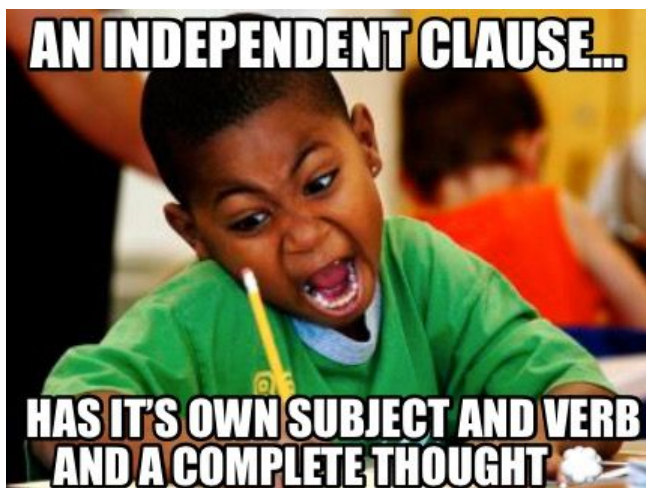
if you want to succeed in life

## Special Mention:

Fragments do not really have anything to do with sentence length.

**Example(s):** While writer Sylvia Plath is known for exploring death and mental illness in her poems.

Sentences that begin with prepositions or conjunctions (while, which, because, but, if, unless, after, and, although, who, that) often lead to fragments.



# THE MANY USES OF THE COMMA

*Not all of the rules listed are in the PowerPoint, and not all of the rules for commas are in these notes. Rules regarding common mistakes are listed here. If you have further questions about commas, ask a tutor or associate with Purdue's website: [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/punctuation/commas/extended\\_rules\\_for\\_commas.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/commas/extended_rules_for_commas.html)*

## Rule 1

Use commas to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses written in a series.

**Example(s):** The candidate promised to lower taxes, protect the environment, and reduce crime.

## Rule 2

Use commas to separate independent clauses when they are joined with any of these seven coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

**Example(s):** I have painted the entire house, but he is still working on sanding the doors.

## Rule 3

Use commas after introductory clauses, phrases, or words that come before (sometimes after) the main clause.

**Example(s):** While I was eating, the cat scratched at the door.

## Rule 4

Use a pair of commas in the middle of a sentence to set off clauses, phrases, and words that are not essential to the meaning of a sentence. If these words are dropped, the sentence will still make sense and retain its basic meaning.

This is also known as a parenthetical phrase.

**Example(s):** I am, as you have probably noticed, very nervous about this.

## Rule 5

Use commas to separate two or more adjectives that describe the same noun when the word **and** can be inserted between them.

**Example(s):** He is a strong, healthy man. (He is a strong **and** healthy man.)

#### Rule 6

Use commas to set off all geographical names, items in dates, addresses, and titles in names. (This one is a doozy; prepare yourself.)

**Example(s):**

1) I lived in San Francisco, California, for 20 years.

(If you use the two-letter capitalized form of a state, you don't need a comma after the state.)

I lived in San Francisco, CA for 20 years.

2) Kathleen met her husband on December 5, 2003, in Mill Valley, California.

(If any part of the date is omitted, leave out the comma)

Kathleen met her husband in December 2003 in Mill Valley, California.

3) Al Baker, M.D., is our family doctor.

#### Rule 7

Use commas to separate a direct quotation from the rest of the sentence.

**Example(s):** Mother asked, "Who wants to get ice cream?" "I do," he said.

#### Rule 8

Use commas surrounding words such as therefore and however when they are used as interrupters.

**Example(s):** I would, therefore, like a response

I will be happy, however, to volunteer my time.

*Again, there are more rules (and exceptions) than the ones listed here. These are just an overview of comma rules.*

# COMMON COMMA ISSUES

## Comma Splices

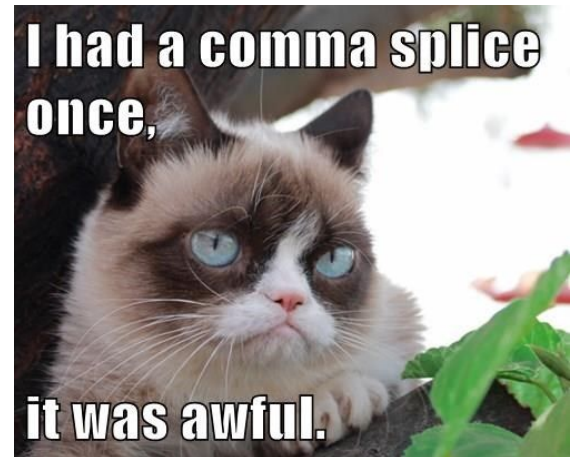
When you want to join two independent clauses, you need a conjunction or a semicolon. A comma alone is not strong enough to join them. This kind of mistake is called a comma splice.

### Example(s):

Incorrect: We were out of milk, I went to the store.

Correct (conjunction): We were out of milk, so I went to the store.

Correct (semicolon): We were out of milk; I went to the store.



## Run-on Sentences

Run-on sentences, also known as fused sentences, occur when two complete sentences are squashed together without using a coordinating conjunction or proper punctuation, such as a period or a semicolon. Run-on sentences can be short or long. A long sentence isn't necessarily a run-on sentence.

## The Oxford Comma

The Oxford comma is the final comma in a list of words. This comma is TECHNICALLY optional; however, not using the oxford comma can cause confusion and change the meaning of the sentence.

### Example(s):

The sweaters were red, blue and green.

The sweaters were red, blue, and green.

These sentences, because of the Oxford comma, have two different meanings. The first sentence means that there are two sweaters where one is red and the other is blue and green.

The second sentence could either mean that there are multiple sweaters that are all red, blue, and green OR that there are three sweaters and one is red, one is blue, and one is green.

# THE SEMICOLON

There are **three main ways** to properly use a semicolon within your writing.

- 1) Use a semicolon to join two **closely related** independent clauses.

**Example(s):** The ice cream man drove by the house today; I got a popsicle!

- 2) Use a semicolon if you need to make a list of items that are separated with a comma. This often occurs when listing locations, names, dates, and descriptions.

**Example(s):**

Over the summer, I visited Philadelphia, PA; Manhattan, NY; and San Francisco, CA.

My favorite authors are Ernest Hemingway, who wrote "Hills Like White Elephants;" J.K. Rowling, who wrote the *Harry Potter* series; and Aldous Huxley, who wrote *Brave New World*.

- 3) Use a semicolon **before** words such as namely, however, therefore, etc., when they introduce a complete sentence.

**Example(s):** That girl is an excellent student; however, she does not know how to properly use a semicolon.

When you use a semicolon  
in your essay



# APOSTROPHES

Use an apostrophe when creating a contraction or when dealing with possessives.

## Contraction

Formed by combining two words and replacing one or more of the medial letters with an apostrophe.

**Example(s):** Do + Not = Don't

Have + Not = Haven't

You + Are = You're

They + Are = They're

## Singular Possessives

Form a singular possessive simply by adding an apostrophe with an s.

**Example(s):** James = James's

Patty = Patty's

Child = Child's

## Plural Possessives

Use an apostrophe after the "s" at the end of a plural noun to show possession.

**Example(s):** The parents' bedroom

The players' coach

If a plural noun doesn't end in "s," add an apostrophe + "s" to create the possessive form.

**Example(s):** The children's table

The women's magazine

The people's vote

## Special Mention

It's vs. Its

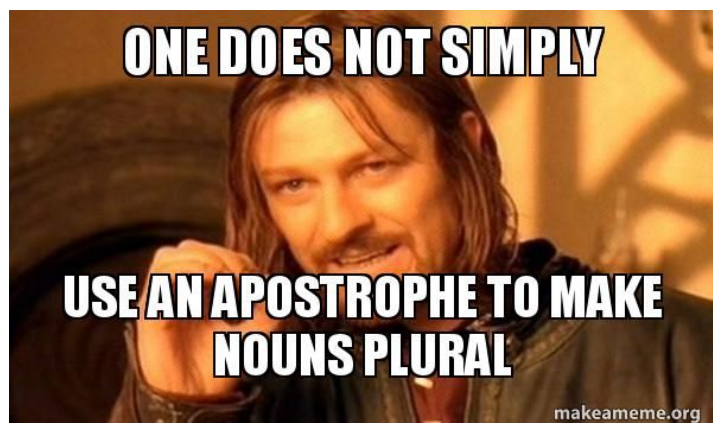
*Its* is the possessive form of *It*.

*It's* = "it is"

(You will never use *its'*.)

**Example(s):** It's a nice day to go for a hike.

His dog loves chasing its tail.



# SPICE UP YOUR SENTENCES WITH SENTENCE VARIATION

Several sentences of the same length can make for bland writing. To enliven paragraphs, write sentences of different lengths. This will also allow for effective emphasis.

## **Simple Sentence**

A sentence with one independent clause and no dependent clauses.

**Example(s):** My aunt enjoyed taking the hayride with you.

China's Han Dynasty marked an official recognition of Confucianism.

## **Compound Sentence**

A sentence with multiple independent clauses but no dependent clauses.

**Example(s):** The clown frightened the little girl, and she ran off screaming.

The Freedom Riders departed on May 4, 1961, and they were determined to travel through many southern states.

## **Complex Sentence**

A sentence with one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

**Example(s):** After Mary added up all the sales, she discovered that the lemonade stand was 32 cents short.

While all of his paintings are fascinating, Hieronymus Bosch's triptychs, full of mayhem and madness, are the real highlights of his art.

## **Compound-Complex Sentence**

A sentence with multiple independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

**Example(s):** Catch-22 is widely regarded as Joseph Heller's best novel, and because Heller served in World War II, which the novel satirizes, the zany but savage wit of the novel packs an extra punch.