

Phrase vs. Clause

Learning Objectives

- To define a Phrase
- To define a Clause
- To identify a Phrase or Clause practically

What is a **Phrase**?

A group of words that lacks a subject-verb combination.

In other words, a phrase is a group of words without a subject performing the action of a verb.

- Note that the definition to the left states that a phrase lacks a subject-verb **combination**, or lacks a subject performing the action of a verb.
- Often, phrases may have subjects and verbs, but they won't be **combined**, or the subject won't be performing or "doing" the verb.
- *Don't worry – if this isn't clear from this slide, I'll explain it in more detail in the next few slides.*

A few easy examples

The examples below are obviously phrases because they lack either a subject or a verb.

Obviously, if the phrase lacks either a subject or verb, it can't have a subject-verb combination, or a subject “doing” a verb.

- **in the east** (*no verb at all*)
- **on a wall** (*no verb at all*)
- **running breathlessly back and forth** (*no subject – what is running?*)
- **grinning sheepishly** (*no subject – who/what is grinning?*)

A few more examples

The examples below are a bit more difficult. These examples contain words that could be subjects and verbs. Note, though, that these words aren't **combined**. In other words, the subject isn't performing the verb.

- Running down the hall
 - *“Running” looks like a verb, and “hall” looks like it could be a subject . But are these words combined? Is the subject doing the verb? Is the hall running?*
 - *Obviously not – halls don't run. As such, this is a phrase.*

More examples

- Looking in the sun.
 - “Sun” looks like it could be a subject, and “looking” seems like a verb. But is the sun looking? Is the subject doing the verb?
 - No. Obviously, a sun doesn’t have eyes, and can’t look. This is another phrase.
- Running with scissors.
 - “Scissors” is a noun, and could be the subject. “Running” looks like a verb. But are the scissors running? Is the subject doing the verb?
 - No – scissors can’t run. Another phrase.

What is a **Clause**?

A group of words with a subject-verb **combination**.

In other words, a clause is a group of words in which a subject performs the action of a verb.

- You'll notice that a clause is the exact opposite of a phrase. A clause has a subject and a verb that are joined or **combined** together.
- In other words, a clause will have a subject that does or performs the action of a verb.

Examples ...

Each of the examples below has a **subject** that is performing a **verb**.

- **Jesus** **wept**.
- **Craig** **passed out**.
- **James** **worked** all semester long on his research project.
- After **Helen** **was** not **invited** to the reception ...
- Before **the storm warnings** **were issued** ...
- Because **I** **forgot** the project...

Two things to notice

1. Some clauses are very short (“Jesus wept”), while others are very long. That’s OK, though. As long as you have a subject combined with or “doing” a verb, a clause is a clause, whether long or short.
2. Some clauses make sense all by themselves and express a complete thought. Other clauses don’t, though – clauses that begin with “after,” “although,” “because,” “even though,” “since,” “while,” “when,” etc. do not express a complete thought. You’ll learn more about the differences between these two types of clauses in the next lesson.

Number of Clauses

- The number of clauses in a sentence is equal to the number of **subject /verb combinations**.
- In other words, whenever a subject pairs up with a verb, you have a clause.
- If you have two instances of a subject pairing up with a verb, then you have two clauses.
- If you have three instances of a subject pairing up with a verb, then you have three clauses.
- If you have four instances of ... etc.

Ex's.

- After I slept late, I was in a rush to get to work.
- This sentence has two clauses. Each clause contains a subject paired up with a verb.

Ex's

- Running out the door, **I dropped** my book bag.
 - This sentence only has one clause. “Running out the door” is a phrase – the door isn’t doing the running!
- As **I ran** out the door, **I dropped** my book bag.
 - Now the sentence has two clauses. Note that “Running out the door” has been changed to “As **I ran** out the door.”

Clause or Phrase -- Which side of the screen contains phrases? Which side contains clauses?

- Howling at the moon
- Riding my go-cart
- Up in the sky
- Sleeping under the stars after a long, hot day
- Beneath the pile of rugs, finding a trap door
- The wolf was howling at the moon.
- I rode my go-cart home.
- She looked up in the sky.
- I slept under the stars after a long, hot day.
- The Gestapo searched beneath the pile of rugs, finding a trap door.

Which is which?

I have highlighted several portions of the sentences below. Identify the highlighted portions as either phrases or verbs.

- **After eating with his disciples,** Jesus led them **to a garden.**
 - (Phrase, clause, phrase)
- **Sitting on her porch swing,** the old woman sang gospel songs.
 - (Phrase, clause)
- My dog wakes me up **every morning at 6 am** with a loud bark.
 - (Clause, phrase, phrase)

How many clauses?

HINT: count the **subject-verb** combinations.

- Sitting on her porch swing, the old **woman sang** gospel songs. (1)
- As **she sat** on her front porch, the old **woman sang** gospel songs. (2)
- After eating with his disciples, **Jesus led** them to the garden, where **he sent** them a few yards away while **he remained** to pray. (3)