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.

http://english-language.blogspot.com/2006/07/what-is-clause.html
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.
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)