# The Clause

## Recognize a clause when you find one.

Clauses come in four types: [**main**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/mainclause.htm) (or independent), [**subordinate**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/subordinateclause.htm) (or dependent), [**adjective**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/adjectiveclause.htm) (or relative), and [**noun**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/nounclause.htm). Every clause has at least one [**subject**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/subject.htm) and one [**verb**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/verb.htm). Other characteristics will help you distinguish one type of clause from another.

### Main Clause

Every [**main clause**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/mainclause.htm) will follow this pattern:

Subject + Verb = Complete Thought.

Here are examples:

Lazy students whine.

***Students*** = subject; ***whine*** = verb.

Cola spilled over the glass and splashed onto the counter.

***Cola*** = subject; ***spilled***, ***splashed*** = verbs.

My dog loves pizza crusts.

***Dog*** = subject; ***loves*** = verb.

Remember that every sentence must have at least one main clause. Otherwise, you have a [**fragment**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/fragment.htm), a major error.

### Subordinate Clause

A [**subordinate clause**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/subordinateclause.htm) will follow this pattern:

Subordinate Conjunction + Subject + Verb = Incomplete Thought.

Here are examples:

Whenever lazy students whine

***Whenever*** = subordinate conjunction; ***students*** = subject; ***whine*** = verb.

As cola spilled over the glass and splashed onto the counter

***As*** = subordinate conjunction; ***cola*** = subject; ***spilled***, ***splashed*** = verbs.

Because my dog loves pizza crusts

***Because*** = subordinate conjunction; ***dog*** = subject; ***loves*** = verb.

Remember that subordinate clauses can never stand alone as complete sentences. To complete the thought, you must attach each subordinate clause to a [**main clause**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/mainclause.htm).

These are the patterns:

Main Clause + Ø + Subordinate Clause.

Subordinate Clause + **,** + Main Clause.

Read these revisions:

**Whenever lazy students whine**, Professor Russell throws chalk erasers at their heads.

Anthony ran for the paper towels **as cola spilled over the glass and splashed onto the counter**.

**Because my dog loves pizza crusts**, he never barks at the deliveryman.

### Adjective Clause

An [**adjective clause**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/adjectiveclause.htm) will begin with a [**relative pronoun**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/relativepronoun.htm) (such as ***who***, ***whom***, ***whose***, ***which***, or ***that***) or a [**relative adverb**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/relativeadverb.htm) (***when***, ***where***, or ***why***).

The patterns look like these:

Relative Pronoun or Adverb + Subject + Verb = Incomplete Thought.

Relative Pronoun as the Subject + Verb = Incomplete Thought.

Here are examples:

Whom Professor Russell hit in the head with a chalk eraser

***Whom*** = relative pronoun; ***Professor Russell*** = subject; ***hit*** = verb.

Where he chews and drools with great enthusiasm

***Where*** = relative adverb; ***he*** = subject; ***chews***, ***drools*** = verbs.

That had spilled over the glass and splashed onto the counter

***That*** = relative pronoun (as the subject); ***had spilled***, ***splashed*** = verbs.

Who loves pizza crusts

***Who*** = relative pronoun (as the subject); ***loves*** = verb.

Like subordinate clauses, adjective clauses cannot stand alone as complete sentences. You must connect them to [**main clauses**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/mainclause.htm) to finish the thought.

Read these revisions:

The lazy students **whom Professor Russell hit in the head with a chalk eraser** soon learned to keep their complaints to themselves.

My dog Floyd, **who loves pizza crusts**, eats them under the kitchen table, **where he chews and drools with great enthusiasm**.

Anthony ran to get paper towels for the cola **that had spilled over the glass and splashed onto the counter**.

Punctuating adjective clauses can be tricky. You must decide if the adjective clause is essential or nonessential and then use commas accordingly.

[**Essential adjective clauses**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/essentialclause.htm) do not require [**commas**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/comma.htm). An adjective clause is essential when you need the information it provides. The clause helps determine which one of many the writer means.

Read this example:

A dog **that eats too much pizza** will soon develop pepperoni breath.

***Dog*** is nonspecific. To know which dog we are talking about, we must have the information in the adjective clause. Thus, the adjective clause is essential and requires no commas.

If, however, we revise ***dog*** and choose more specific words instead, the adjective clause becomes [**nonessential**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/nonessentialclause.htm) and does require commas to separate it from the rest of the sentence.

Read this revision:

My dog Floyd, **who eats too much pizza**, has developed pepperoni breath.

### Noun Clause

Any clause that functions as a noun becomes a [**noun clause**](https://chompchomp.com/terms/nounclause.htm).

Consider this sentence:

You really do not want to know the **ingredients** in Aunt Nancy's stew.

***Ingredients*** = noun.

If we replace the noun ***ingredients*** with a clause, we have a noun clause:

You really do not want to know **what Aunt Nancy adds to her stew**.

***What Aunt Nancy adds to her stew*** = noun clause.