

Phrases, Clauses, and Sentences

Phrases: groups of words that work as syntactic units. Prepositional phrases are the most famous, but the other lexical categories get phrases, too. Articles do not get to pile up.

- Prepositions: on the rocks, over the river, through the woods, to grandmother's house...
- Verbs: was to have been being thought, will see, had been grown; phrasal verbs: sit up, stand down...
- Nouns: a world-famous concert pianist, (this is) what the student said about his lousy grade...; if one likes determiner phrases, noun phrases usually are determiner phrases
- Pronouns: (Between) you and me, (that's the end)...
- Adjectives: three hideous green (dresses); huge Christmas tree (farm) (note that nounish words can function as adjectives)
- Adverbs: (the bird flew) way, way, way over there; (they did not run) very quickly...
- Conjunctions: And then (this happened), so then (that happened), and whenever (that happens)...
- Interjections: holy schnike, (Batman), oh my god...

Clauses: groups of words with subjects and verbs. They are of two types: main (independent, matrix) and subordinate (dependent). Main clauses can be used as sentences; subordinate clauses have to be combined with at least a main clause, or they become fragments.

- Independent: the cat ate the cheese; we like to watch television after work; have you ever really wondered about that?; stop it!; I'd rather be whistling in the dark; what time is it?
- Dependent: because the cat was hungry; whenever we find a palm tree; (do you know) what time it is? (this is the dog) who bit the postal worker on the leg last Christmas Eve

Dependent clauses are introduced by relative pronouns (who, that, which, why...) for relative clauses or subordinating conjunctions (whenever, because, nevertheless...) for subordinate clauses.

- Relative clauses: This is the dog who bit the postal worker; do you know what time it is?; this is where the Old Man of the Mountain used to be.
- Subordinate clauses: I don't take an umbrella because I like the rain; they told me that he'd like to go to the party after he finishes his homework; whenever there's a party, I stay home.

Sometimes, relativizers can be dropped: they told me (that) he'd like to leave; the clauses are still relative clauses. Relative clauses are of two types: restrictive (narrower meaning) and non-restrictive (broader claims).

- The students who like pizza are spending all of their money on it (restrictive: says that it's possible that not all of the students like pizza)
- The students, who like pizza, are spending all of their money on it (non-restrictive: says that all of the students like pizza—note the different punctuation)

Sentences: independent clauses that are presented as sentences. They are mostly a written phenomenon because spoken discourse can usually be divided up in a lot of different ways, thanks to different combinations of phrases and clauses. Intonation patterns can help determine what people imagine to be sentences when speaking, but not always, and not always reliably or consistently.