English Grammar

A Student's Guide to Clause Types in Academic Writing

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Clauses can contain 5 different components

- Subject
- Verb
- Object
- Complement
- Adverbial
Subject

The person or thing which performs the action of a verb (Cambridge Learner's Dictionary)

Students [subject] must write in an academic style.

Academic writing [subject] is difficult.

The purpose of this essay [subject] is to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet.
Verb

A word or phrase that describes an action, condition or experience (Cambridge Learner's Dictionary)

This essay will discuss [verb describing an action] the role of the monarchy in the UK today.

The monarch is [verb describing a state or condition] the figurative head of state in the United Kingdom.
Object

An object can be direct or indirect

**Direct Object:** A person, place, or thing that is affected by the action of a verb, or involved in the result of an action (CLD)

**Indirect Object:** A person, place, or thing that benefits from the action of a verb

(Adapted from Seely, 2009)
Complement

Part of a clause that completes information about a subject or object that appears earlier in the clause.

Academic writing [subject] is difficult [subject complement]

Academic writing makes students [object] feel stressed [object complement]

Adapted from Seely, 2009
Adverbial

A word or phrase in a clause that answers questions

**Where?** The course is offered at the University of Glasgow [adverbial]

**When?** Many students graduate when they are in their early twenties [adverbial]

**Why?** Psychology is important because little is known about the workings of the mind [adverbial]
There are 5 basic clause types in English

Subject + verb
Subject + verb + object
Subject + verb + complement
Subject + verb + object + complement
Subject + verb + indirect object + direct object
Examples

Subject + verb

A book [subject] fell [verb].

Subject + verb + object


Subject + verb + complement

The book [subject] was [verb] interesting [complement].
Examples

Subject + verb + object + complement

The student [subject] found [verb] the book [object] interesting [complement].

Subject + verb + indirect object + direct object

The student [subject] gave [verb] his professor [indirect object] some notes [some notes].
Some clauses contain 'adverbials': words or phrases about 'where, when, how, or why'.

Subject + verb + adverbial

Subject + verb + object + adverbial
Adverbial Clauses

Examples

Subject + verb + adverbial: A book fell on the floor.

The adverbial 'on the floor' answers the question: Where did the book fall?

Subject + verb + object + adverbial: A student read the book with interest.

The adverbial 'with interest' answers the question: How did the student read the book?
Adverbial clauses are not usually essential to the meaning of the sentence

Example

He found the book *on the shelf*

The adverbial *'on the shelf'* could be removed and the sentence would still make sense.
Some adverbial clauses are essential to the grammar and meaning of the sentence

I placed the book **on the table**

The meaning of the verb 'placed' requires an adverbial to be grammatically correct.

**Note:** It is possible to check whether a verb requires an adverbial by checking in a good learner's dictionary.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Clause</strong></th>
<th>Part of a sentence which contains a subject and a verb. A clause may also contain an object, complement or adverbial (Adapted from Seely, 2009)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main clause</strong></td>
<td>Part of a sentence which contains 2 or more clause components. Clause components are: subject; verb; object; complement; adverbial (Adapted from Seely, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subordinate clause</strong></td>
<td>Part of a sentence which 'can act as the subject, object, complement, or adverbial of the main clause' (Seely, 2009, p. 29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent clause</strong></td>
<td>Same as a 'subordinate' clause</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Connective
A general term which means a 'linking' word. Common connectives are; adverbials, coordinators and subordinators (Adapted from Seely, 2009)

### Coordinator
A word which joins two main clauses (Seely, 2009). Common coordinators are; *and, but, or.*

### Subordinator
A word which joins a main clause with a dependent (or subordinate) clause (Seely, 2009). Common subordinators are; *if, because, so, since, where, when why.*


Thank you for watching!

Dr Barbara Howarth