



# A Letter From the Editors

## The Fundamentals of Grammar

Let's start from the beginning, shall we? To better understand comma splices, coordinating conjunctions, and other grammar mechanics, it helps to review the basics. Let's take it back to grammar's origin story with a lesson on the fundamentals.

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### What is a complete sentence?

Complete sentences express a complete thought. They have a main noun (also known as a subject) performing the action of a main verb.

*"We lost."* ("We" is our noun. "Lost" is our verb.)

*"It was our pleasure to serve a delicious meal."* ("It" is our noun. "Was" is our linking verb.)

*"A while back, I learned how to play guitar."* ("I" is our noun. "Learned" is our verb.)

While a complete sentence *must* have a main noun and a main verb, it also may include other parts of speech. These nine different types of words are:

- Nouns
- Pronouns
- Verbs
- Adjectives
- Adverbs
- Prepositions
- Conjunctions
- Articles/determiners
- Interjections

Some of these types of words can act as *other words* depending on what they're trying to achieve in a sentence, which can get complicated. With that in mind, we'll broaden our categories into four basic groups:

- **Nouns** (things)
- **Verbs** (actions)
- **Modifiers** (words that describe things and actions)
- **Connectors** (words that connect things, words, and modifiers)

Side note: Interjections like "Ugh," "Ew," "Oof," etc. are an exception to the above. They're

not technically one of the four kinds of words, but, when used, they perform a kind of action that makes them similar to verbs.

Let's look at some of these words in a sentence:

*"Serena (noun) won (verb) her (possessive pronoun) tennis matches (noun) against (connector) absolutely (modifier) everyone (noun)."*

Now that we've covered complete sentences and the types of words that comprise them, let's talk about clauses.

## What is a clause?

Clauses are the groups of words written together to communicate a complete or incomplete thought. There are two types of clauses: independent and dependent.

An independent clause is a group of words that express a complete thought, which means it can function as a complete sentence on its own or stand within a longer sentence.

Reminder: A complete sentence includes a main noun performing the action of the main verb.

If you can identify both the subject and verb in your sentence or clause, then you have an independent clause.

*"I ran."* ("I" is our subject. "Ran" is our verb.)

*"We're so glad you enjoyed everything!"* ("We" is our subject. The "are" in "we're" is our linking verb.)

*"We watered the existing plants, and we planted new ones nearby."* ("We" is the subject in both clauses. "Watered" is the verb of the first clause. "Planted" is the verb of the latter clause.)

There are four types of sentences in the English language, but the two that we'll talk about today include simple and compound sentences.

A simple sentence is a sentence made up of a single independent clause. In our above examples, "I ran" and "We're so glad you enjoyed everything" are examples of simple sentences.

A compound sentence is a sentence made up of two independent clauses. Think of it as two simple sentences with a connector between them. The sentence, "We watered the existing plants, and we planted new ones nearby," is an example of a compound sentence because it has two independent clauses with a connector ("and") between them.

Tip: The main types of connectors that you'll hear your editors referring to are your FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. These are what we also refer to as coordinating conjunctions. Remember that all FANBOYS must have a comma before them when connecting two independent clauses.

When connecting two independent clauses, look out for the dreaded comma splice. We cannot connect two independent clauses with *only a comma*. Your editors will hiss at you.

*"We're excited to see you, it's been so long!"*

*"We're excited to see you – it's been so long!"*

*"We're excited to see you. It's been so long!"*

Now let's talk about dependent clauses. A dependent clause is a group of words that does *not* express a complete thought, which means it can't function as a complete sentence either on its own or within a longer sentence.

Dependent clauses can have nouns and verbs, but, unlike in an independent clause, those nouns and verbs don't work to form a complete thought. Instead, they depend on the sentence's independent clause to be understood.

*"She often bakes whenever she has time."*

*"As anyone will tell you, we love this city."*

*"We'll go to the store after we stop by the gas station."*

These bolded sections are your dependent clauses. They rely on the independent clause in the sentence to be understood, and if we removed these dependent clauses, their independent clauses could still stand as their own complete thoughts.

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Why does all of this matter? In better understanding the basics of a sentence and how each word and clause functions, you'll be able to identify your independent clauses and your dependent clauses, which will help to avoid comma splices and other common grammar errors.

Now that you've gone back to the beginning, try revisiting our established letters on commas. They may click in a way that they hadn't before. But first, take our quiz.

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**Quiz**

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## Jourden Sander

Jourden is an Austin-born and -raised Sagittarius who remembers a time when Leslie was here and free parking spots existed. She received her MFA in fiction over the summer, and with that MFA, she's writing a novel and nagging you about commas. You can find her playing tennis, performing with her improv troupe, dancing to Toxic by Britney Spears, or declining ice cream in her spare time. She fully believes the Mattress Firm conspiracy theory and probably finds you suspicious. In da clerb, we all fam.

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