

Building Sentences

How to express several ideas within one sentence.

Subjects and Objects in Sentences.

A sentence only needs a verb and a noun (or pronoun) to be complete. Nouns or pronouns that perform the action of the verb are called the **subject** of the sentence. Let's look at this sentence:

Dogs eat.

"*Dogs eat*" is a complete sentence. It has a subject, a verb, and it expresses a complete idea. This subject + verb construction forms the core of all sentences. Anything we add is just a nice addition.

Let's add a little more information. What do dogs eat?

*Dogs eat **hamburgers**.*

We just added another noun that tells us what dogs eat. This is called the **object** of the sentence. The subject is the "doer" of the action (verb), and the object is the "receiver" of that action.

Modifiers and Connecting Words

Let's write something descriptive about the dogs. In other words, let's add an adjective:

*The **skinny** dogs eat hamburgers.*

Now, let's write something about *how* the dogs eat the hamburgers. In other words, let's describe or modify the verb with an adverb:

*The skinny dogs eat hamburgers **slowly**.*

Where does this eating happen? We can add a prepositional phrase that locates this sentence in time or space:

*The skinny dogs eat hamburgers slowly **at the table**.*

Clauses

A **clause** is made up of a **subject** and a **verb**. There are two types of clauses. Look at the sentence (below). It can stand alone as a complete idea. A group of words that has a subject and a verb and expresses a complete idea is called an **independent clause**.

*The skinny dogs eat hamburgers slowly **at the table**.*

We can let independent clauses stand alone as sentences, or we can combine them with a conjunction. A **coordinating** conjunction would put the two sentences in a kind of equal relationship:

*The skinny dogs eat hamburgers slowly at the table, **and** their owners don't seem to mind.*

If we added a **subordinating conjunction**, the second sentence would become dependent on the first.

*The skinny dogs eat hamburgers slowly at the table **because** their owners don't seem to mind.*

In the sentence (above), the clause, “because their owners don't seem to mind,” is a **dependent clause** because it is not a complete idea by itself. The first clause in the sentence is an independent clause because it *is* a complete idea by itself.

Remember, an **independent clause** can express a complete idea by itself. A **dependent clause** cannot express a complete idea by itself—it must be connected to an independent clause.

Note: Sentences will often begin with a dependent clause and put the independent clause at the end. When this occurs, put a comma after the dependent clause. See below:

***Because their owners don't seem to mind,** the skinny dogs eat hamburgers slowly at the table.*