

**Making English Grammar Meaningful and Useful**  
**Mini Lesson #12**  
**Clauses and Phrases: The Difference is Simple**

The **purpose** of this lesson is to explain the difference between **Dependent Clauses** and **Phrases**, and to present the three basic kinds of **Dependent Clauses**.

A **Clause** is a group of words that go together to form a unit. It has one essential characteristic; a **Clause** must have a **Subject-Verb Combination**. A **Phrase** is a group of words that go together, but which does **not** have a **Subject-Verb Combination**.

Sentences are composed of at least one clause which gives a complete idea. **Dependent Clauses** are those that do not communicate a complete idea. They are connected to an independent clause in some way. English has 3 kinds of **Dependent Clauses**. Each does the same thing as a particular part of speech and, therefore, each is named for a part of speech. There are **Adjective Clauses**, **Noun Clauses** and **Adverb Clauses**.

**Adjectives** describe nouns; **Adjective Clauses** also describe nouns. However, adjectives generally come before the nouns they describe, while Adjective Clauses follow the nouns they describe. The following sentence contains both an Adjective and an Adjective Clause. They each describe the noun 'man'.

He is the **young** man **who you met yesterday**.

**Nouns** are used as Subjects or Objects of sentences. **Noun Clauses** are also used as Subjects or Objects of sentences. These two sentences contrast the use of a Noun and a Noun Clause. Both are objects of the sentences in which they are used.

The teacher asked **a question**  
The teacher asked **if the students understood**.

**Adverbs** indicate time or reason among other things. **Adverb Clauses** indicate the same information. These two sentences contrast the use of an Adverb and an Adverb Clause.

He did his homework **late in the evening**.  
He did his homework **after he came home from the party**.

**This lesson was developed by John Nelson and Tymofey Wowk, 2012**

ELLs will find it helpful to contrast **Dependent Clauses** with similar **Phrases**. The following sentence pairs illustrate these differences.

**An Adjective Clause and an Adjective Phrase:**

I met the man **that teaches the grammar class**.

I met the man **teaching the grammar class**.

**A Noun Clause and a Noun Phrase:**

He asked me **if I would help him study**.

He asked me **to help him study**.

**An Adverb Clause and an Adverb Phrase:**

The game was cancelled **because it rained**.

The game was cancelled **because of the rain**.

ELLs find **Clauses** and **Phrases** confusing and mysterious, but they do not need to be. Learners can be taught to recognize and produce word groups with and without Subject-Verb Combinations. Once this is mastered, competence using these 3 kinds of clauses and phrases is more easily accomplished. Understanding their basic constructions and relating them to simple parts of speech will enable ELLs to produce Dependent Clauses and Phrases easily and use them accurately.