



Phrases and Clauses

A **phrase** is a group of two or more words, usually related in meaning, but with no subject/verb combination. As long as it is lacking both a subject and verb, a phrase cannot turn into a sentence, no matter what you might add to it.

There are five types of phrases:

- **Prepositional** - begins with a preposition, ends with a noun or pronoun that acts as the object of the preposition. Prepositional phrases can act like an adjective or adverb, but never a noun. When you are editing your writing, it's a good idea to "read out" prepositional phrases from your sentences to make it easier to find the subject and the verb. Check here or in any handbook of English grammar for a list of prepositions: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_prepositions
- **Gerund** - contains a present participle (ends in -ing) and acts like a noun. This means a gerund phrase can act as a subject of a clause or sentence, e.g., *the **teachings** of some Buddhist schools focus on liberation from earthly existence*; an object of a verb, e.g., *if one eases **suffering***; or preposition, e.g., *the secondary level of man's **thinking***; or as a predicate noun (aka subjective completion) that completes the meaning of its preceding linking verb; e.g., *happiness is **knowing***
- **Participial** - contains a present, past or perfect participle (have, having, has or had + the past participle). Since it is a phrase, the subject is understood and the subject itself is named in the sentence for clarity, e.g., ***Having gone** out their way to stop by the flower shop to pick up a bouquet for their hosts, Jackie and Ira were late for the dinner party.*
- **Infinitive** - contains the infinitive (to + verb form used to make present tense) and can function as a noun, adjective or adverb, e.g., ***To become** an excellent golfer was my goal last year.*



- **Absolute** - consists of a noun or noun substitute followed by an adjective or participle. Although the phrase refers to the rest of the sentence, it is joined to the main clause by a comma, not by a preposition or subordinating conjunction; e.g., *Online instruction having become popular, the government now wants all testing for licenses to be available through their websites.* Use these sparingly or avoid them entirely since they lead to dangling constructions, a compositional no-no.

A **clause** is also a group of words, but all clauses have a subject and a verb. Strictly speaking, all sentences have one independent clause, and that one clause can be long and wordy or it can be short and terse.

There are two types of clauses:

- **Independent** clauses can stand alone as sentences – these have a subject and a verb and make up a complete thought; e.g., *The main cause of suffering is traced to selfish craving.*
- **Dependent**, also called **subordinate** clauses, start with a subordinate conjunction and cannot stand alone as sentences -they have to be attached to an independent clause to have any grammatical weight; e.g., *While the cause of suffering is traced to selfish craving ...* is a dependent clause. You can see it has a subject (*the cause*) and a verb (*is traced*), but because the clause starts with the subordinating conjunction, *While*, the whole thing becomes dependent on the rest of the sentence, which, by the way, is: *humans can, through the practice of wisdom and compassion, transcend the treadmill of repeated existences.*
- **Subordinating conjunctions** include (among others not in this list): *because, as, if, even though, although, since, whereas, when, how, whenever, while, and so that.* Subordinating conjunctions can also be duplicates of words that have other functions (such as *when, how, even*), so you have to watch where the word is placed in a sentence to see its function.