

Phrases and Clauses

APSU Writing Center Handout

Phrases

A phrase is a group of words that functions as a unit within a sentence. It can lack a subject, a verb, or both. It cannot stand alone as a complete sentence; instead, it adds information, description, or detail to an independent or dependent clause.

Prepositional Phrase

Consists of a preposition, its object, and any words that modify that object.

- **Examples:** in the school, on the table, under the bridge

Infinitive Phrase

Includes an infinitive verb (to + base form of the verb) and any complements or modifiers.

- **Examples:** to leave the store quickly, to finish early, to win the game

Participial Phrase

Includes a participle and any modifiers, pronouns, or noun phrases related to it.

- **Examples:** running down the hall, destroyed by the fire, excited for the trip

Gerund Phrase

Consists of a gerund (-ing form of a verb functioning as a noun) and any modifiers or objects.

- **Examples:** writing the essay carefully, swimming in the lake, playing the piano

Examples of Phrases in Sentences

- **Incorrect Example:** Shoppers had.
- **Correct Example:** Shoppers had to leave the store.
- **Explanation:** While “Shoppers had” contains a subject and verb, it lacks full meaning. Adding the infinitive phrase “to leave the store” completes the idea.

Clauses

A clause is a group of words that contains both a subject and a verb (predicate). They can function as complete sentences or as parts of larger sentences.

Independent Clause

Stands alone as a complete sentence.

- **Example:** *She studies hard.*

She is the subject, and *studies* is the verb.

Dependent Clause

Cannot stand alone; it must be connected to an independent clause to form a complete thought.

- **Example:** *When she has a test...*

In this clause, *she* is the subject and *has* is the verb.

A dependent clause can be attached to an independent clause to create a complete sentence:

- **Example:** *When she has a test, she studies hard.*

Reference

Aaron, J. E. (2017). *The LB brief handbook* (5th ed.). Pearson.