



## APSU Writing Center

### Phrase versus Clause

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Resource: *The LB Brief Handbook*, 5th edition

#### Phrases

- A **phrase** is a group of words that modifies a sentence. It can lack a subject or the verb or both. A phrase cannot sit alone or act as a complete sentence. Instead, a phrase provides more information to clarify meaning or add description to an independent or dependent clause.

#### Different types of phrases:

- prepositional phrase (*in the school*)
  - A **prepositional phrase** is a group of words consisting of a preposition, its object, and any words that modify the object.
- infinitive phrase (*to leave the store*)
  - An **infinitive phrase** consists of an infinitive verb plus any complements or modifiers.
- participial phrase (*destroyed by the fire*)
  - A **participle phrase** is a group of words containing a participle, modifier, and pronoun or noun phrases.
- gerund phrase (*writing the essay*)
  - A **gerund phrase** is a phrase consisting of a gerund and any modifiers or objects associated with it.
- **Example 1**
  - **Incorrect:** A fire started.
  - **Correct:** A fire started *in the school*.
    - Although this is a complete clause since it contains a subject and a verb, adding the prepositional phrase *in the school* to the end of it will add information and clarify meaning.
- **Example 2**
  - **Incorrect:** Shoppers had.
  - **Correct:** Shoppers had *to leave the store*.
    - Although *Shoppers had* could be called a complete clause since it contains a subject and a verb, it lacks full meaning. Adding the verbal phrase *to leave the store* to the end of it will add information and clarify meaning.



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- **Example 3**

- In the above example, the reader may want to know why shoppers have to leave the store; therefore, adding a participial phrase *destroyed by the fire*, adding another clause *it was* and a conjunctive adverb *because* will provide more information and clarify meaning:
  - **Example:** Shoppers had to leave the store because it was *destroyed by the fire*.

- **Example 4**

- Another phrase is called the gerund phrase. This phrase begins with a verb that ends in –ing but acts as a noun (and thus forms a phrase) instead of a verb.
  - **Example:** Sometimes James has trouble.
- Although this is a complete clause since it contains a subject (James) and a verb (has), adding the gerund phrase *writing the essay* to the end of it will add information and clarify meaning:
  - **Example:** Sometimes James has trouble with *writing the essay*.

**This sentence can also be written in reverse, but a comma must follow the phrase.**

- **Example:** *Writing the essay*, sometimes James has trouble.
- **Example:** *In the school*, a fire started.

### Clauses

- A **clause** is a complete sentence. A **complete sentence must contain a subject and a verb (predicate).**
- An **independent clause** is a full sentence that stands alone in meaning.
  - **Example:** *She studies hard.* (*She* is the subject, and *studies* is the verb.)
- A **dependent clause** is not a full sentence, but is attached to an independent clause to provide meaning. It is called “dependent” because it depends on an independent clause to give the sentence meaning.
  - **Example:** *When she has a test...* (In this clause, *she* is the subject, and *has* is the verb.)
  - **Example** of a dependent clause that is attached to the independent clause to provide full meaning:
    - *When she has a test, she studies hard.*