Independent and Dependent Clauses

• Independent Clauses •

The general way ideas are structured involves a subject and a verb—or, as we should think of them, an actor and an action. To take a simple example, let's look at the sentence:

The search bar wasn't working.

We have our actor, <u>the search bar</u>, that's doing the action of <u>not working</u>. The one idea that's communicated by this sentence is that *some word*, whatever it is, *fits well where it is placed*.

When you have a group of words that contains both <u>actor</u> and <u>action</u> (subject and verb), it's called a **clause**. When you have a clause that can stand on its own as a sentence—a word group with both actor and action that doesn't rely on anything else to communicate a complete idea—it's an **independent clause**.

No matter what else it has tacked on, <u>every complete sentence</u> must have an independent clause at its core.

• Dependent Clauses •

However, not every clause can stand on its own. Take, for instance, the following:

Although the bar is usually full on Saturdays.

We have the actor, <u>the bar</u>, and the action of <u>being full</u>. But what is the idea here? We don't have enough information to understand an entire coherent idea. The reason is that word although—it's a connecting word that makes this actor/action set rely on some other piece of information in order to make proper sense.

This type of connecting word is called a **subordinating conjunction**—it relates different parts of a sentence, making one part rely on another. Subordinating conjunctions create **dependent clauses**, which rely on another clause to create a full sentence.

To return to our example, let's see it as a complete sentence:

Although the bar is usually full on Saturdays, yesterday there were only a few patrons.

As we can see here, for this example to be a proper sentence, it needed two full clauses. Our main actor is the <u>patrons</u>, who performed the action of <u>being few</u>—making the one idea communicated by this sentence that only a few people were at the bar on Saturday.

Subordinating conjunctions come in many forms, and in the following examples you'll see that they turn independent clauses, which can stand on their own as sentences, into dependent clauses that are clearly *not* sentences:

I'm not hungry. → <u>Although</u> I'm not hungry...

She ran towards the bus stop. → <u>While</u> she ran towards the bus stop...

You're a great guy. → <u>Even if</u> you're a great guy...

For each of these, an independent clause takes a subordinating conjunction and becomes a dependent clause, which needs another independent clause to complete the sentence.