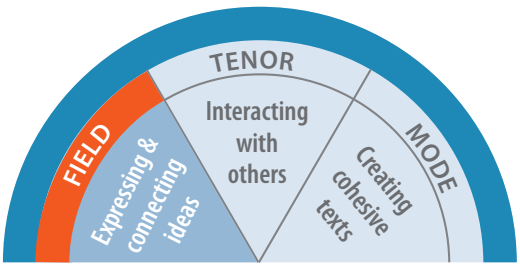
Chapter 3

CONNECTING IDEAS

Looking at meaning: Making connections



We have seen how clauses can function to represent various aspects of our experience: what is done, what is said, what is thought, felt or perceived, and what simply 'is'.

We can also construct relationships between these aspects of experience.

We can simply add two clauses together: *She opened her eyes* ***and*** *looked about her*. Or we could provide alternatives: *To be* ***or*** *not to be*. Or make a contrast: *I've got all my worldly goods in it,* ***but*** *it isn't heavy*. Or we could speculate about 'What if?': *Which would you rather be* ***if*** *you had the choice – divinely beautiful or dazzlingly clever or angelically good?* Or indicate cause and effect: *And people laugh at me* ***because*** *I use big words*. Or show relationships of time: ***When*** *he reached Bright River, there was no sign of any train.*

It is through such connections that we are able to reason about our experience – to construct logical relationships. If learners are to be able to reason in increasingly sophisticated ways, they will need to expand their linguistic resources for connecting ideas.

Structuring coherent sentences

A major skill that students need to develop is how to create well-structured sentences. Student texts often sound awkward either because of the overuse of simple, single-clause sentences or because of the use of long, rambling, incoherent sentences.

Simple sentences are quite appropriate (and indeed functional) if used strategically. In text types such as newspaper stories, for example, they are typically short, uncluttered and 'to the point'. They are also effective when used at particular stages in a story – to disrupt the rhythm, to introduce a staccato effect or to make a significant point.

On the other hand, longer sentences are appropriate when there are a number of closely related ideas that need to be brought together. These sentences generally require careful crafting, however, and students need to be aware of the various ways in which information can be presented and clauses combined.

Look at the following text by a Year 1 student that uses a sequence of short sentences:

There was a giraffe. Her name was Gigi. She was grumpy. She was also old. And she had a long neck.

This information could have been combined into a single clause by compacting much of the information in these sentences into one noun group:

Gigi was **a grumpy, old giraffe with a long neck**.

Other sentences, especially in recounts and stories, often end up as a long string of clauses, resembling spoken language:

One day I was playing with my friends and I saw a ghost and it was flying towards me so I ran as fast as I could but then it disappeared then it appeared again so I ran home then the ghost went through the wall then I went to my bedroom but the ghost went through my bedroom door then I woke up and it was all a dream.

Apart from working on the development of this story, the student needs help with combining clauses into distinct sentences. A first step could be to put each 'idea' on a separate line:

One day I was playing with my friends
and I saw a ghost
and it was flying towards me
so I ran as fast as I could
but then it disappeared
then it appeared again
so I ran home
then the ghost went through the wall
then I went to my bedroom
but the ghost went through my bedroom door
then I woke up
and it was all a dream.

This makes it easier to then work on crafting the ideas into a series of more coherent sentences:

One day, when I was playing with my friends, I saw a ghost flying towards me. I ran as fast as I could but then it disappeared. (Suddenly) it appeared again so I ran home. But the ghost went through the wall. I went to my bedroom but the ghost went through my bedroom door. Then I woke up (to find) it was all a dream.

Troubleshooting

The above weaknesses are common in younger students' writing and many will learn how to construct more satisfactory texts as they gain more experience through reading and writing. There are many older students, however, who still have trouble structuring coherent, well-balanced sentences and who need explicit assistance to, e.g.,:

- compact information into a noun group rather than a string of clauses
- most effectively use simple sentences
- combine clauses in a variety of ways and manage the organisation of longer sentences

- develop compound sentences, complex sentences and compound-complex sentences
- use quoting and reporting sentences
- use commas, semicolons, colons, parentheses, dashes, inverted commas and other punctuation to add clarity to lengthier sentences.

Certain texts, such as procedures, need to be very straightforward and easy to read. These texts tend to use simple sentences, consisting of a single clause (or one message per sentence). Other texts need to use quite lengthy, complex sentences to develop a particular line of reasoning or to create connections between ideas relating to time, reason, purpose or manner. With reference to meaning, then, we are interested in matters such as the nature of the relationship between the ideas, the complexity of these relationships, and the clarity with which they are expressed.

A note on terminology

When we use language to represent what's going on, we can refer to the ideational function of language. (To ideate means to form an idea.) Within the ideational function, however, we can identify resources at the clause level that allow us to represent our experience of the world (the experiential function) – as in Chapter 2. When we talk about the ways in which ideas can be connected, we refer to the logical function[1] – looking at the logical relationships between ideas (as in this chapter).

Ideational function
(language for thinking about the world)

- **Experiential function**
  (language for representing ideas)
- **Logical function**
  (language for combining ideas)

Combining items

With regard to form, we are interested in the various ways in which relationships within sentences can be structured. We can combine language items in various ways, from the level of the word, group and phrase through to the clause.

Words and phrases

Words, groups and phrases can be combined using 'joining words' or conjunctions.

Nouns and noun groups		
cats	**and**	dogs
big ones	**and**	little ones
tea	**or**	coffee

Verbs and verb groups		
tried	**but**	failed
huffed	**and**	puffed
stand up	**or**	sit down

1 Technically, this is called the logico-semantic function.

Adjectives and adjective groups		
hot	**and**	sweaty
tired	**but**	happy
very sad	**although**	inevitable

Adverbs and adverb groups		
upstairs	**and**	downstairs
so calmly	**yet**	so bravely
sooner	**or**	later

Prepositional phrases		
up hill	**and**	down dale
at dawn	**and**	at dusk
as a friend	**or**	as a foe

Sometimes we combine two noun groups simply by using one to expand on another:

Noun group	Noun group
my neighbour	Mrs Brown …
Henry VIII,	King of England and Supreme Head of the Church of England …
Mr Knightley,	a sensible man about seven- or eight-and-thirty …

Traditionally, this is referred to as 'nouns in apposition' and is characteristic of more mature writing.

Sentences

So far we have been working at the level of connections below the clause (words and groups). Here we will look at single clauses (simple sentences) and at how clauses are combined in various ways to produce different types of sentences: compound, complex and compound–complex.

Simple sentences

A simple sentence is one that contains a single independent clause – a clause that can stand on its own, e.g.:

> **Place** the seeds in the dirt.
>
> He **muttered** his apologies.

A basic (though not sufficient) definition of a clause is that it is a group of words containing a verb. Notice that in the simple sentences above there is only one main verb.

Simple sentences are not necessarily short ones:

> The only realistic large-scale approach to the prevention of desertification **is** through good land management in semi-arid areas.
>
> The Rat **told** Mole some very thrilling stories – about weirs, and sudden floods, and leaping pike, and steamers, and about herons, and adventures down drains, and night-fishings with Otter, or excursions far afield with Badger.

Simple sentences are simple in terms of their structure (i.e. a single clause), not necessarily in terms of their content:

> A striking quality of this passage, and indeed of this whole volume, **is** its beautifully compressed, poetic language.

The sentence above is a simple sentence consisting of a single clause, but its meaning is not 'simple'.

Troubleshooting

When considering how many clauses there are in a sentence, remember that embedded clauses don't count as separate clauses. Most embedded clauses are part of the noun group, telling more about the head noun, though they can also modify an adverb (in an adverb group) or an adjective (in an adjective group). (See Chapter 2, page 49.) Consider the simple sentences in the following tables.

	Noun group	
		Embedded clause
Chuang Tzu was	a Chinese philosopher	[[who lived during the 4th century BC]].
There are	so many things	[[to do]].
Harry tried to remember	the dream	[[he had been having]].
	Adverb group	
She ran	so quickly	[[that she was puffed]].
	Adjective group	
The shelf was	too high	[[to reach]].

Sometimes an embedded clause can function as a Participant. In this case it is still not seen as a clause in its own right but simply as part of the larger clause.

Embedded clause as Participant	
[[That we are in the midst of a crisis]]	is now well understood.
[[To win a championship]]	is my greatest ambition.
[[Eating the oysters]]	was a big mistake.

Combined clauses

Many sentences, however, contain more than one clause – sometimes as many as four or five (and more!). For example:

Possum **found** a safe tree
and **climbed** to the farthest branches
where he **snuggled** into a ball,
closed his weary eyes
and **fell** asleep.

We can combine clauses in different ways to make different types of sentences:

- compound sentences
- complex sentences
- compound–complex sentences.

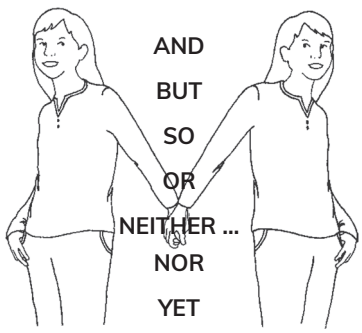
Compound sentences

Compound sentences consist of two or more independent clauses. Each of these clauses is capable of standing on its own and conveying a message. Each has equal status and provides equally important information. These clauses may be linked together in a sentence using such words as *and*, *or*, or *but*. For example:

He climbed into bed	**independent clause**
and he fell fast asleep.	**independent clause**

Susan walked home	**independent clause**
but the others caught the bus.	**independent clause**

You could ring him at work	**independent clause**
or you could try him at home.	**independent clause**



Independent clause **Independent clause**

Words used to combine independent clauses include: *and*, *so*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, *and so*, *not only … but also*, *neither … nor*, *either … or*.

These are called coordinators or coordinating conjunctions.[2]

Note that, when the Subject of the verb is the same in both clauses, it can be omitted from the second clause:

> So the Rat went away, and [he] sat on the river bank in the sun, and [he] made up a song about them.
>
> They all stopped talking and [they] listened.

2 These are sometimes called 'linkers'.

Troubleshooting

Students often have trouble punctuating compound sentences. A common error is to join them with a comma instead of a conjunction. This is sometimes called a 'comma splice':

- ✖ I was late, I caught a taxi.
- ✔ I was late so I caught a taxi.

A semicolon (if the relationship between the clauses is tight) or a full stop can be used instead of a conjunction.

- ✔ I was late; I caught a taxi.
- ✔ I was late. I caught a taxi.

Sometimes, however, a dependent clause can be used on its own for a certain effect, particularly in literary texts, e.g. *Though he didn't know why*.

Contrary to popular belief, coordinating conjunctions can be used to begin a sentence:[3]

> And have you never known the pleasure and triumph of a lucky guess? (*Emma*, Jane Austen)
>
> But he still sat in his shirt and trousers. (*Aaron's rod*, DH Lawrence)
>
> So the honest, brown cookies crumbled away in obscurity. (*An old-fashioned girl*, Louisa May Alcott)
>
> Yet he also gives the idea of hidden fires. (*The hound of the Baskervilles*, Arthur Conan Doyle)
>
> Nor did he take any notice of elbows on the table. *(Wind in the willows, Kenneth Grahame)*

This is often used for emphasis or to create a distinct break between related ideas.

Spoken language tends to use strings of clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *but* and *so*. Such sentences are also often found in written recounts and narratives that are intended to reflect the spoken nature of storytelling:

> **So** he took hold of Pooh's front paws
>
> **and** Rabbit took hold of Christopher Robin,
>
> **and** all Rabbit's friends and relations took hold of Rabbit,
>
> **and** they all pulled together …
>
> **And** for a long time Pooh only said 'Ow!' … And 'Oh!' …
>
> **and** then, all of a sudden he said 'Pop!' as if a cork were coming out of a bottle
>
> **and** Christopher Robin and Rabbit and all relations went head-over-heels backwards
>
> … **and** on top of them came Winnie-the-Pooh free!
>
> **So** with a nod of thanks to his friends, he went on with his walk through the forest, humming proudly to himself
>
> **but** Christopher Robin looked after him lovingly,
>
> **and** said to himself 'Silly Old Bear!'
>
> *Winnie-the-Pooh*, AA Milne

3 Though it is sometimes argued that rather than use conjunctions (e.g. *and*, *but*, *so*) in this case, it is preferable to use text connectives (*in addition*, *however*, *therefore*) – see Chapter 5, page 133.

Troubleshooting

Young children tend to rely more heavily on compound sentences (though they are quite capable of understanding and using basic complex sentences, particularly in their oral language). Their recount texts in particular typically consist of a string of independent clauses joined by *and* and *so*. Simple information reports often consist of a number of factual statements joined by *and*. As students learn to express thoughts with more sophisticated relationships, they will need to use complex sentences.

Even though compound sentences are characteristic of spoken language and the language of young children, they can also express quite complicated meanings:

> This gives a moisture-retentive medium **but** allows excess water to drain from the roots.

We can't assume that the meaning of coordinating conjunctions is straightforward, particularly for young learners. *And*, for example, can refer to the simple combination of two items (*she heard a little animal scratching **and** scrambling about in the chimney*), a sequence in time (*it turned round **and*** [then] *swam slowly back to her*), or a reason (*we were running late, **and*** [so] *we caught a taxi*). 'Or' can refer to things that are alternatives (*Did you say pig **or** fig?*) or things that are the same (*The forum, **or** market place, is on the site of the old church.*), or a consequence (*Be off, **or*** [if not] *I'll kick you down stairs!*).

Complex sentences

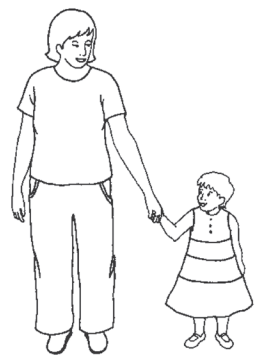
Complex sentences generally involve greater complexity of thought as students learn to express more subtle and intricate relationships between ideas. They are often used, for example, to convey the logical reasoning needed in argumentation and explanation. Although even young students are capable of using complex sentences (involving clauses of time in particular, e.g. *When we got back to school, we had our lunch.*), older students often still have problems with complex sentences that involve higher-order thinking skills.

In a complex sentence, there is one clause expressing the main message and another clause (or clauses) elaborating on that message in some way. While the main clause is independent, the other clause cannot stand on its own – it is dependent on the main clause for its meaning.

They ran	**independent clause**
as if they were being chased by a madman.	**dependent clause**

The metal rod expanded	**independent clause**
because it was heated.	**dependent clause**

If the box breaks	**dependent clause**
the beads will spill everywhere.	**independent clause**



Independent clause **Dependent clause**

Independent clauses are also known as main or principal clauses. Dependent clauses are sometimes called adverbial clauses because they often perform a job similar to other adverbials, providing more information about how, when, where and why an activity takes place. They are also referred to as subordinate clauses.

Troubleshooting

A frequent error is to use a dependent clause with no independent clause. These are sometimes called sentence fragments.

- ✖ Because Africa was their proper home.
- ✖ Having thanked the sharks again for their kindness.

Dependent clauses are generally joined to an independent clause using subordinating conjunctions[4] (or subordinators).

Different types of conjunctions are used to express different types of relationships between ideas. The following table gives an indication of the ways in which subordinating conjunctions can be used.[5]

	Subordinating conjunctions	Example
Time		
When?	after, before, when, as	He disappeared **when** *it was his turn to wash up.* **Before** *I decide,* I want to talk to Harry.
How long?	as long as, since, until, while	I haven't seen her **since** *she moved to Dubbo.* **Until** *the rash clears up,* you will have to stay at home.
How often?	whenever, every time	I get goosebumps **whenever** *I hear him.* **Every time** *she rings up,* I pretend I'm not home.
Manner		
Means	by, through, with	**By** *working overtime*, she managed to finish the project.
Comparison	as if, as though, as, like	I couldn't lie **as** *he does*. She lived her life **as if** *she were indestructible*.
Cause		
Reason	as, because, since, in case, as a result of	CFC gases are banned **because** *they cause holes in the ozone layer*.
Purpose	so that, in order to, so as to, in order that	**Since** *you obviously aren't interested*, let's leave it. They went outside **in order to** *see what the noise was.* We left early **so that** *we could get a parking space*.
Condition		
	if, as long as, in case, unless, on condition that	Never sit on a nest of ants **unless** *you're wearing cast-iron pants*. **If** *she wants to come*, she'll have to hurry up.
Concession		
	although, even though, even if, while, whereas, despite, much as	**Even though** *they weren't hungry*, they ate a full meal. **While** *recognising his skill*, I don't think he is right for the job.
Adding		
	besides, as well as	**Besides** *working full-time*, she was looking after her father.

4 These are sometimes called binders.
5 This table is an adaption from Halliday & Matthiessen 2004.

Replacing		
	except for, other than, instead of, rather than	**Instead of** *attacking them*, the wolf led them out of the forest.

Troubleshooting

Apart from learning to express logical relationships in their writing, students also need to be able to comprehend such relationships in their reading. Research indicates that many students don't fully understand these relationships and therefore have difficulty following the meaning of a text.

Although the simpler sentences of early childhood and conversational language pose little challenge to most children, more complex multi-clausal sentences -- characteristic of academic settings and expository texts – can be more daunting for some struggling readers and writers (Scott & Balthazar, 2013).

It is important, therefore, to monitor students' understanding of the relationship between ideas during activities such as guided reading and intensive reading sessions.

Typically, a dependent clause can go either before or after the independent clause. This gives us flexibility in terms of what we want to use as the start of the sentence. (See Chapter 5, page 127.) Note that when the dependent clause comes first in the sentence, it is usually followed by a comma.

	Independent clause	Dependent clause
✔	She soon got warmed up	**although** she was a little afraid at first.
✔	She went alone	**because** Drew was working.
✔	It got warmer and warmer	**as** they sailed further and further into the South.

	Dependent clause	Independent clause
✔	**Although** she was a little afraid at first,	she soon got warmed up.
✔	**Because** Drew was working,	she went alone.
✔	**As** they sailed further and further into the South,	it got warmer and warmer.

Interestingly, you can't reverse the order of clauses in a compound sentence. This is a useful test if you are not sure which is which.

	Independent clause	Independent clause
✔	The doctor was a very kind man	**but** he hadn't any money.
✔	The king began to tremble	**and** was very much afraid.

	Independent clause	Independent clause
✖	**But** he hadn't any money	the doctor was a very kind man.
✖	**And** was very much afraid	the king began to tremble.

Compound-complex sentences

Some sentences contain a combination of relationships between clauses. These can be referred to as compound–complex sentences.

Two kookaburras flew into the tree	**independent clause**
and cackled loudly	**independent clause**
as they scanned the nearby bush for food.	**dependent clause**

They talked over the new plan	**independent clause**
while old Hannah cleared the table,	**dependent clause**
then out came the four little work baskets,	**independent clause**
and the needles flew	**independent clause**
as the girls made sheets for Aunt March.	**dependent clause**

Little women, Louisa May Alcott

Mrs. Pendyce fixed her eyes upon him,	**independent clause**
for this was her habit,	**independent clause**
and she thought	**independent clause**
how she would run up to town alone	**dependent clause**
when the spring came again,	**dependent clause**
and stay at Green's Hotel,	**independent clause**
where she had always stayed with her father	**dependent clause**
when she was a girl.	**dependent clause**

The country house, John Galsworthy

Troubleshooting

Sometimes the conjunction is omitted and the relationship between clauses remains implicit, e.g.:

> Sally was fuming. She had been omitted from the team. All she could think of was revenge.

In this case, students have to be able to infer the relationship:

> Sally was fuming **because** [reason] she had been omitted from the team
> **so** [result] all she could think of was revenge.

These hidden relationships are not always easy for students to retrieve.

Quoting and reporting

There is another way in which we can combine messages. When we use saying verbs and thinking verbs, we often include a clause (or clauses) indicating what was said or thought.

Quoting

In some cases, we quote the actual words that are said or thought. This is often referred to as 'direct speech'. The quoting clause can come either before or after the quoted clause – or can even interrupt the quoted clause.

The girl cried:	**quoting clause**
'Apple tree, please hide us!'	**quoted clause (actual words)**

'What's the matter?'	**quoted clause (actual words)**
asked Andrew.	**quoting clause**

'There is nothing to worry about,'	**quoted clause (actual words)**
Maria thought to herself.	**quoting clause**

'Eat one of my crab-apples,'	**quoted clause (actual words)**
the tree answered,	**quoting clause**
'and I will tell you.'	**quoted clause (actual words)**

Reporting

Rather than quoting the exact words, we sometimes report what was said or thought using a dependent clause. This is called 'indirect speech'.

I told him	**reporting clause**
that I was sorry.	**reported clause**

She said	**reporting clause**
she never wanted to see him again.	**reported clause**

They thought	**reporting clause**
it was rather odd.	**reported clause**

Reported clauses typically begin with 'that' – although it is often omitted (as in the last two examples above). They can sometimes begin with 'wh-' words, as in these examples:

She wondered **whether** they were alive or dead.

Mr Fisher explained **why** he had arrived late.

Dad asked **what** I wanted for dinner.

Nellie wanted to know **who** was at the door.

Note: Not all sentences beginning with a saying or thinking process are complex sentences, as shown in these examples:

Mr Fisher explained **the reason for his late arrival**.

Nellie wanted to know **the answer**.

In these last two examples, the words representing what is said or thought (in bold) are noun groups, not clauses. So these sentences only contain one clause.

When to use quoting or reporting

Both quoting and reporting are found in text types such as newspaper articles, stories, advertisements, biographies, arguments and recounts.

In terms of meaning, students might be encouraged to think about why a writer would choose either to use a direct quote or to report indirectly by paraphrasing what has been said. They might also reflect on how quoting and reporting on what characters say, think and feel in a narrative can help build up the character and give insights into their motivations, reflections, intentions or desires. When reading and writing expository texts, students might discuss when it is appropriate to quote someone, why you would select a particular authority to quote, how quoting can add weight to an argument, and the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising.

Troubleshooting

In terms of accuracy, students need to know how to punctuate quoted speech and reported speech. Quoted speech in particular can cause difficulty for some students.

In stories, for example, they need to know about using a comma (or question mark or exclamation mark) before the speech mark, about where to place the quoting clause, and about when to use single speech marks and double speech marks.

In expository writing, students need to know how to quote authorities they are referring to (e.g. within the body of the text for a short quote, or as a separate indented paragraph for a longer quote) and how to reference these quotes.

Perceiving

Apart from sentences involving quoting and reporting of speech and thought, sentences involving perceiving processes are often structured in a similar way. That is, the perceiving clause can be followed by a 'that' clause stating what is felt, or seen, or heard, or touched or smelled.

She saw	**perceiving clause**
that the ferry was already leaving.	**what is perceived**

We heard	**perceiving clause**
that you had left town.	**what is perceived**

He sensed	**perceiving clause**
that the spider was crawling up his leg.	**what is perceived**

I smelled	**perceiving clause**
that the toast was burning.	**what is perceived**

The following excerpt from *Anne of Green Gables* (by Lucy Maud Montgomery) provides a description of Anne through what an observer might see and think:

> An observer **might have seen**
>
> that the chin was very pointed and pronounced;
>
> that the big eyes were full of spirit and vivacity;
>
> that the mouth was sweet-lipped and expressive;
>
> that the forehead was broad and full.
>
> The observer **might have concluded**
>
> that no commonplace soul inhabited the body of this stray woman-child.

Other types of clauses

Non-finite clauses

In creating complex sentences, we can also use a *non-finite* dependent clause.

You can get immediate help	**independent clause**
by **dialling** the emergency number.	**dependent clause**

To make vegetable soup,	**dependent clause**
you will need a clear broth.	**independent clause**

A *non-finite* clause is a 'stripped back' clause, usually without an explicit Subject (e.g. *you*), modality or tense (e.g. as carried in an auxiliary verb such as *could* or *was*), or subordinating conjunction (e.g. *as*, *if*). Often you can 'translate' a *non-finite* clause into its finite form by reinserting such features. For example:

NON-FINITE
They crawled to the top of the hill **to see** the surrounding landscape.

FINITE
They crawled to the top of the hill **so that** [+ conjunction] **they** [+ Subject] **could** [+ auxiliary] **see** the surrounding landscape.

NON-FINITE
Sitting alone in her bedroom, she began to think of what had happened.

FINITE
As [+ conjunction] **she** [+ Subject] **sat** [+ tense] alone in her bedroom, she began to think of what had happened.

NON-FINITE
Shocked by the news, they hurried to the hospital.

FINITE
Because [+ conjunction] **they** [+ Subject] **were** [+ tense] **shocked** by the news, they hurried to the hospital.

Note the different forms of *non-finite* clauses in the sentences above:

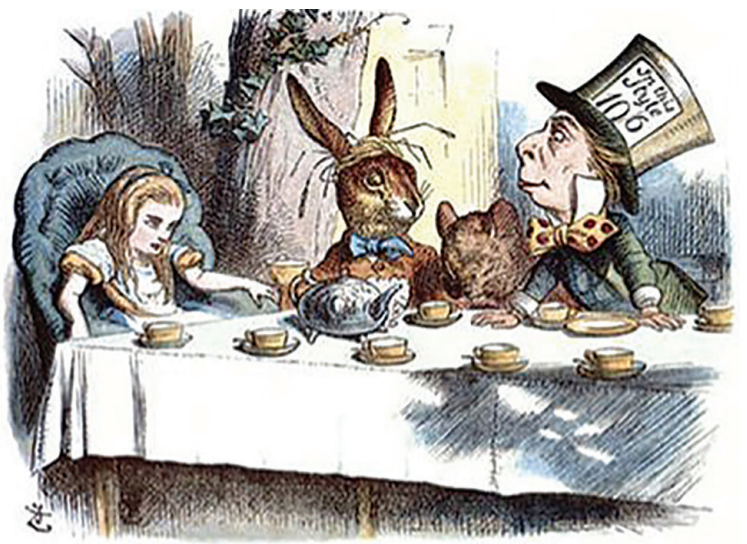
'**to** –' clauses

'**– ing**' clauses

'**– ed**' clauses

Non-finite clauses are more economical, characteristic of the 'compacted' nature of written language. They are just as common as 'full' (finite) dependent clauses, as in these excerpts from a chapter of *Alice's adventures in Wonderland*:

> 'What day of the month is it?' the Hatter said, **turning to Alice**: he had taken his watch out of his pocket, and was looking at it uneasily, **shaking it every now and then, and holding it to his ear**.
>
> The Dormouse shook its head impatiently, and said, **without opening its eyes**, 'Of course, of course; just what I was going to remark myself.'
>
> 'Have you guessed the riddle yet?' the Hatter said, **turning to Alice again**.
>
> The Dormouse again took a minute or two **to think about it**.
>
> 'What did they draw?' said Alice, **quite forgetting her promise**.
>
> 'Treacle,' said the Dormouse, **without considering at all this time**.
>
> This answer so confused poor Alice, that she let the Dormouse go on for some time **without interrupting it**.
>
> 'They were learning **to draw**,' the Dormouse went on, **yawning and rubbing its eyes**, for it was getting very sleepy.
>
> She began **by taking the little golden key**, and **unlocking the door that led into the garden**. Then she went to work **nibbling at the mushroom**.



Non-finite clauses are often used to introduce a sentence, as in these examples from *Anne of Green Gables*:

> **Dropping her precious carpet-bag**, she sprang forward a step and clasped her hands.
>
> **Sitting down on a chair by the table, flinging her arms out upon it, and burying her face in them**, she proceeded to cry stormily.
>
> **Her eyes glistening with delight**, Anne dropped on her knees and gazed out into the June morning.
>
> **Her hands clasped tightly in her lap**, Anne sat mutely on the ottoman.
>
> **Flushed and beaming**, Mrs Spencer returned …
>
> **Scared at his own success**, Matthew was gone.

The use of *non-finite* clauses is typically a sign of greater maturity and students should be encouraged to observe and employ them where appropriate.

Interrupting clauses

Sometimes, one clause interrupts another.[6] Instead of saying, for example, *And then she slipped away **without saying a word***, the writer might insert *'without saying a word'* inside the previous clause: *And then, **without saying a word**, she slipped away.*

Note how interrupting clauses are usually enclosed by commas.

Here are a few more examples, taken from *Love among the chickens* by PG Wodehouse:

> Mr Beale, **having carefully deposited the gun against the wall and dropped a pair of very limp rabbits on the floor**, proceeded to climb in through the window.
>
> It had always been my experience that, **when Ukridge was around**, things began to happen swiftly and violently …
>
> 'This,' **said Ukridge, leaning against the door and endeavouring to button his collar at the back**, 'reminds me of an afternoon in the Argentine.'
>
> Aunty, **still clutching a much-bitten section of a beef sandwich**, was breathing heavily.

Sometimes it is prepositional phrases, rather than clauses, that interrupt:[7]

> We, **in the meantime**, were chasing the rest of the birds all over the garden.
>
> On my return, I found Ukridge, **in his shirt sleeves and minus a collar**, assailing a large ham.

Interrupting clauses and phrases are often used in order to change the emphasis or for stylistic reasons. They do, however, break the flow of the text and require concentration on the reader's part. The following sentences (from *Love among the chickens* by PG Wodehouse) contain multiple interruptions. Consider what challenges these might pose for the casual or inexperienced reader.

> What I wanted, **to enable me to give the public of my best (as the reviewer of a weekly paper, dealing with my last work, had expressed a polite hope that I would continue to do)** was a little haven in the country somewhere …

6 These are also called 'enclosed clauses'.
7 In this case, the sentence won't necessarily be a complex one as the prepositional phrase is not a dependent clause.

> The bustle of the platform had increased momentarily, until now, **when, from the snorting of the engine, it seemed likely that the train might start at any minute**, the crowd's excitement was extreme …
>
> The red-headed Beale, **discovered leaning in an attitude of thought on the yard gate and observing the feathered mob below with much interest**, was roused from his reflections and despatched to the town for the wire and sugar boxes.

This last example of interrupting clauses is from *The avalanche* by GFH Atherton:

> The vast ruin, **with its tottering arches and broken columns, its lonely walls looking as if bitten by prehistoric monsters that must haunt this ancient coast, the soft pastel colours the great fire had given as sole compensation for all it had taken, the grotesque twisted masses of steel and the aged grey hills that had looked down on so many fires**, had appealed powerfully to his imagination.

Relative clauses

Defining relative clauses

We have already met one type of relative clause when we were looking at the noun group (e.g. *Dinosaurs were a successful group of animals* ***that emerged between 230 million and 240 million years ago***). These are also referred to as embedded clauses, as they are embedded in the noun group, functioning as Qualifiers that provide further information about the thing in question. Embedded clauses usually specify 'which one' so they are sometimes called '*defining* relative clauses' (also 'restrictive relative clauses').

She chased

the cat	that had stolen the cheese (defining relative clause – 'which one?')
Noun group	

They were looking for

the man	who drives a bright red car (defining relative clause – 'which one?')
Noun group	

Most relative clauses begin with a relative pronoun: *that*, *which*, *who*, *whom*, *whose*. These are sometimes preceded by a preposition: *about which*, *in which*, *by which*, *to whom*, *for whom*.

Some relative clauses begin with words[8] such as:

when (I remember **the day when my uncle arrived at our house**.)

why (**The reason why he left** is still a mystery.)

where (Maybe it wasn't **a place where he felt at home**.)

Relative clauses can also take the form of a *non-finite* clause:

She stepped along **the deep-rutted, grassy lane bordered with wild rose bushes**.

He saw **the child waiting patiently at the station**.

8 Technically referred to as relative adverbs.

It was **time to go to bed**.

The best way to make porridge is with water rather than milk.

Non-defining relative clauses[9]

There is, however, another kind of relative clause. These simply add a bit of extra, non-essential information. They don't specify which thing is being spoken about and are not part of the noun group. These are called '*non-defining* relative clauses'. They are generally enclosed by commas. A few examples follow from *Anne of Green Gables* (LM Montgomery):

> Her mouth was large and so were her eyes, **which looked green in some lights and moods and grey in others**.
>
> And she is good and smart, **which is better than being pretty**.
>
> That bridge led Anne's dancing feet up over a wooded hill beyond, **where perpetual twilight reigned under the straight, thick-growing firs and spruces**.
>
> Mrs Lynde, **who was sitting knitting by her kitchen window**, watched Anne approaching.

Look at the difference between these two sentences.

My sister **who lives in Parramatta** is coming to visit next week.

(Answers 'Which one?')

My sister**, who lives in Parramatta,** is coming to visit next week.

(Provides some additional, optional information.)

Both of these are relative clauses, but their meaning is quite different. In the first example, the relative clause is defining which sister we are referring to (the sister who lives in Parramatta), so this is a defining relative clause. In the second example, the commas indicate that the relative clause is simply adding some non-essential information, making it a non-defining relative clause.

9 Also called non-restrictive relative clauses.

Non-defining relative clauses can also take the form of a *non-finite* clause:

Matthew, ~~who was~~ dressed up with a white collar and ~~who was~~ driving a buggy, was heading to the station.

The distinction between defining and non-defining relative clauses is a fine one and probably of more interest in the later years of secondary school. However, as you can see, punctuation can make a difference to the meaning of the sentence.

Troubleshooting

In their reading, many learners experience difficulties in comprehending these less 'standard' types of clauses. It is worth spending time reading aloud passages containing such clauses, using intonation and pausing to indicate boundaries and chunks.

Students also need demonstrations of how to read sentences carefully in order to identify relationships between ideas, rather than skimming quickly through a text. In their writing, they might need support in constructing sentences that create increasingly complex meanings and yet retain their clarity.

Combining clauses: Monitoring students' learning

While not intended to serve as formal assessment, the following questions might help when observing learners' progress in comprehending and using various types of sentences across the years of schooling.

Young learners

- When listening and reading, can students comprehend a relatively wide range of clause combinations?
- When reading to students, would it be useful for the teacher to model the 'meaning units' (clauses) within sentences through intonation and pausing?
- Can students identify short and long sentences, the number of 'ideas' contained within a sentence, and any words that join the ideas?
- Can they point out the punctuation signalling the beginning and end of a sentence?
- Are they using compound sentences in their writing?
- Are they starting to use some complex sentences in written texts, for example recounts containing 'time clauses' (*When we got home, I fell asleep.*)?

Later primary

- Are students comprehending and employing a wide variety of sentence types (compound, complex, compound–complex, as well as quoting and reporting sentences) in both their spoken and written language?
- Do they write sentences that are not overly long and rambling, overly short and stilted, awkwardly structured, or poorly punctuated?
- Are they learning how to use quoting and reporting (direct and indirect speech) and how to punctuate quoted speech and thoughts?

- Can they discuss when and why to use quoting and reporting sentences?
- In their reading, are students being exposed to texts that provide models of richly patterned sentences?
- If a class text proves to be challenging, are students introduced to strategies for 'unpacking' the text (e.g. seeing it in terms of 'meaning units'; identifying the relationship between clauses; unravelling lengthy noun groups).
- Can they identify basic examples of simple, compound and complex sentences?
- Can they talk about how different types of common conjunctions join ideas in various ways (e.g. time, cause, adding information)?

Older learners

- Are students' written texts (and prepared oral presentations) differentiated from their more spontaneous spoken language, demonstrating a more crafted quality?
- Are they using structures such as embedded clauses and nouns in apposition to make their writing more compact?
- Is careful and informed reworking of sentences a regular feature of their writing practices (including relevant aspects of punctuation: commas, semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses)?
- Is there evidence of students appropriately using a wide range of dependent clauses (e.g. time, manner, cause, condition, concession), extending their ability to make increasingly complex connections between ideas?
- Are they able to identify, in broad terms, different types of sentences (simple, compound, complex and compound–complex) and to recognise different types of relationships between clauses as signalled by conjunctions?
- Do their texts include a variety of well-selected simple, compound, complex and compound–complex sentences, depending on the text type?
- Do their sentences display a range of clause types (dependent/independent; finite/non-finite; defining relative clauses/non-defining relative clauses; interrupting clauses) as appropriate?
- Are they able to reflect on and discuss the selection of different sentence types in terms of how they contribute to the meaning, impact and flow of the text?
- Are quoting and reporting sentences used effectively, with accurate punctuation, in texts such as stories, biographies, historical recounts and expositions?
- Are they aware of the difference between quoting, reporting, paraphrasing and plagiarism?
- Are they learning how to cite an author in an expository text and provide an adequate reference?
- In their reading, are they able to comprehend sentences containing more challenging relationships signalled by subordinating conjunctions such as *although*, *in spite of*, *even if*, *while* and *unless*?
- Are they able to interpret the meaning of sentences that contain interrupting clauses and phrases?
- Can they understand the difference in meaning between defining and non-defining relative clauses?

Connecting ideas: Analysed texts

The following texts have been analysed to provide examples of different kinds of clauses and how they can be combined. This is not to suggest that students should be asked to analyse a text in this way.

- Embedded clauses are indicated by double square brackets **[[**…**]]**.
- Division between clauses is indicated by double slashes **//** where appropriate.
- Interrupting clauses are indicated by double angle brackets **«** … **»**.
- Groups that include embeddings are underlined.

Two texts have been analysed – a simple historical recount by a 7-year-old student and a historical exposition by a 15-year-old student. Apart from providing examples of analysed sentences, the texts demonstrate the increasing complexity over the years of schooling, from the relatively basic sentences of early primary school to the advanced relationships between clauses expected of students in high school.

Text A: A historical recount by a 7-year-old

Simple sentence	
One day in 1888 a ship **crashed** onto the reef near Queensland.	**single independent clause**
Simple sentence	
It **was carried** onto the reef by a swift current.	**single independent clause**
Compound sentence	
A baby **was born** the same day	**independent clause**
and its crying **reached** the ears of the fearful sailors.	**independent clause**
Simple sentence	
It **was floating** on a large board in the ocean.	**single independent clause**
Complex sentence	
The sailors **knew**	**reporting clause**
they **could not reach** the baby.	**'what was reported'**

Text B: A historical exposition by a 15-year-old

Assess the impact of World War II on women's lives and roles.

Simple sentence	
Women's lives and roles in Australian society **were changed** irreversibly by WWII.	**single independent clause**
Complex sentence	
As Darlington **points out**,	**reporting clause**
many women **demanded**	**reporting clause**
to be involved in the War effort more directly [[than they had been allowed in previous wars]].	**'what was reported' (using a non-finite clause) includes an adverb group with an embedded clause**
Simple sentence	
Women voluntarily **joined** organisations [[where they learned new skills [[that would be valuable // if the War reached Australia]]]].	**independent clause – includes a noun group with embedded clauses**
Complex sentence	
Although they **were paid** a little less than the wages [[paid to men]]	**dependent clause (concessive) – includes a noun group with embedded clause**
for doing the same job,	**dependent clause (non-finite)**
women in cities **worked** in factories and steel mills,	**independent clause**
while their rural counterparts **took on** shearing, dairying, crop planting and harvesting.	**dependent clause (contrastive)**
Simple sentence	
Interestingly, Darlington **mentions** an issue [[regarding the opposition [[women encountered in their fight for equality]]]].	**independent clause – includes a noun group with two embedded clauses**
Complex sentence	
He **says**	**reporting clause**
that « although the Government **used** extensive propaganda recruitment campaigns // **to encourage** women // **to join** the workforce and service », this great change in traditional gender roles **encountered** hostility from sections of society at the time.	**'what is reported' – including interrupting clauses**
Simple sentence	
These **include** the media, the Catholic Church, and some men [[who feared a reduction in their wages]].	**single clause – includes a noun group with an embedded clause**

Compound sentence	
The service experience **had** a profoundly liberating effect on many women,	**independent clause**
and after the War some **sought** jobs [[that would continue their independence and liberation]].	**independent clause – includes a noun group with an embedded clause**
Simple sentence	
Many **had** problems [[giving up the responsibility [[the War had given them]]]].	**single clause – includes embeddings**
Complex sentence	
Others, however, **were** happy [[to return to the 'normality' of domestic life]]	**independent clause – includes an adjective group with an embedded clause**
when the War **ended**.	**dependent clause (time)**
Complex sentence	
Finally, Darlington **explains**	**reporting clause**
how women's independence **was taken away** from them by the Government, Catholic Church and media	**'what was reported'**
as the War **drew** to a close.	**dependent clause (time)**
Complex sentence	
He **says**	**reporting clause**
that it **is** clear [[that women **were expected** // **to return** to their traditional gender and family roles, // whether they **wished** to or not]].	**'what was reported'**
Complex sentence	
It **seems**	**reporting clause**
that « even though women **had made** a huge contribution to the war effort », there **would be** no change in social attitudes.	**'what was reported' – interrupted by concessive clause**

As we can observe, students need to develop control over a much broader range of ways of combining ideas to make increasingly sophisticated meanings as they move through the years of schooling.