

Clauses



A **clause** is part of a sentence. A **clause** must contain a **verb** (a doing or being word). The **main clause** in a sentence makes sense on its own; it can usually be written as a sentence by itself. A **subordinate clause** gives further meaning to the **main clause** but does not make complete sense on its own.

Look at this sentence.

As time went by, the people grew weary of hearing the words of wisdom.

The **main clause** is “the people grew weary of hearing the words of wisdom” – it could be a sentence on its own. The **subordinate clause** is “as time went by” – it is not a complete sentence on its own.

Write down the **main** and **subordinate clauses** in the sentences below.

In a small town, there was a small house in which lived a young man, his wife, and the young man’s sister.



main clause:

.....

subordinate clause:



They returned to the great tree again and again, hoping to hear the words that would ease their misery.

main clause:

subordinate clause:

.....

As the days passed, the unwatered, uncared for mango tree started drying up and its leaves began to fall.

two **main clauses**:

.....

subordinate clause:

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Write down the **main** and **subordinate clauses** in the sentences below.

In a small town, a young man, his wife, and the young man’s sister all lived together.



main clause: *a young man, his wife, and the young man’s sister all lived together*

subordinate clause: *In a small town*



Again and again, the people returned to the great tree, but no voice spoke to them.

main clause: *the people returned to the great tree*

two subordinate clauses: *Again and again, but no voice spoke to them*

A short while later, the neglected mango tree lost its leaves and it began to die.

two main clauses: *the neglected mango tree lost its leaves*

it began to die

subordinate clause: *A short while later*

This page features an exercise in identifying main clauses in longer sentences.

This can be difficult for less-fluent readers who need encouragement to read words in groups rather than individually. Explain that a clause must contain a verb (otherwise it’s a phrase).