Independent & Dependent Clauses

A clause is a group of words containing a subject and a verb. Often, we use both dependent (subordinate) and independent (main) clauses in sentences, making them more complex.

Independent Clauses
An independent clause can stand alone as a sentence. It contains a subject, a verb, and often an object or complement.

Examples: The eggs are rotten.
They were left out in the hot sun.

Dependent Clauses
A dependent clause cannot stand alone as a sentence; it must be accompanied by an independent clause. To join a dependent and independent clause in a sentence, a subordinating conjunction must be used.

Examples:

Subordinating Conjunction Because they were left out in the hot sun, the eggs are rotten.
Dependent Clause *Independent Clause*

Subordinating Conjunction Although the eggs are rotten, Howard boiled them.
Dependent Clause *Independent Clause*

Variations
The examples above show dependent clauses placed in front of independent clauses with a subordinating conjunction (S.C.) linking the two at the beginning of the sentence. However, dependent clauses can also be placed *after* independent clauses in a sentence.

Example:

The eggs are rotten because they were left out in the hot sun.
Independent Clause *S. C.* *Dependent Clause*

Placing the independent clause at the beginning makes the subject clear for the reader, and the sentence is simpler and more straightforward.

Common Subordinating Conjunctions
The following chart is adapted from Fowler & Aaron (2010, p. 251).

Cause/Effect	Condition		Comparison / Contrast	Purpose	Concession	Space or Time	
As	Even if	Whenever	As	In order that	Although	After	Until
Because	If	Since	As if	So that	As if	As long as	When
In order that	If only	When	As though	That	Even if	Before	Whenever
Since	Provided	Whether	Rather than		Though	Now that	Where
So that	Unless		While		Even though	Once	Wherever
			Whether			Since	while

The information for this handout was compiled from the following source:
Steer, J. M., & Carlisi, K. A. (1998). *The advanced grammar book* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
Fowler, H. R., & Aaron, J. E. (2010). *The little, brown handbook* (11th ed.). New York, NY: Longman.

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