

## Clauses and Commas

### What is a clause?

A clause is a sentence fragment containing a subject and a verb.

### What is an independent clause?

An independent clause is a clause that can stand alone as a complete sentence.

Example: *I can see the dog across the street.* (Contains subject and verb “I can see” and stands alone as a complete thought)

### What is a dependent clause?

A dependent clause is a clause that is “dependent” on another independent clause to be understood.

Example: *If I open the blinds* (Contains subject and verb “I open” but cannot stand alone)

*If I open the blinds, I can see the dog across the street.* (The dependent clause needs the independent clause to be fully understood.)

## Using Commas with Dependent Clauses

**When using a dependent clause, a comma should separate the dependent clause from the independent clause *only if* the dependent clause is placed at the beginning or middle of the sentence.**

Example of introductory clause (comma needed): *Once you retake a course you have previously failed, the new passing grade will replace the failing one towards your cumulative GPA.*

Example of ending clause (no comma needed): *The new passing grade will replace the failing one towards your cumulative GPA once you retake a course you have previously failed.*

**In the case of an dependent clause at the beginning of a sentence, the comma is placed directly between the end of the dependent clause and the beginning of the independent clause (or main sentence). In the first example above, the comma is between *blinds* and *I*. In the second example, the comma is between *failed* and *the*.**

**\*\*Note that many dependent clauses will use the words *if, because, since, once, as, in order to*.** If you use these words to begin a sentence, you will need a comma after the introductory clause. If you are not sure where to place the clause, read the sentence out loud, and you will find that the comma that you write can go into the place where you pause when you speak.