Complex Sentences

1. Focus

Explain Complex Sentences

Say: A complex sentence contains one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. These are often separated by a comma. An independent clause is a sentence part that has its own subject and verb. It could stand on its own as a complete sentence. A dependent clause has a subject and verb, but it still can’t stand on its own as a sentence. It depends on words from the rest of the sentence to complete an idea. Writers of persuasive essays must be able to use complex sentences to vary their sentence lengths and make their writing more interesting.

Model Identifying Parts of Complex Sentences

Display the modeling text (without the circles and underlining) on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Modeling Text

Read sentence 1. Say: I think the clause that comes before the comma is a dependent clause. I can test this by covering up the rest of the sentence and seeing if this opening clause could stand on its own as a sentence. It can’t. If I read only the words “While their hard-working parents toil away at jobs,” it leaves me wondering whose parents the clause refers to and what happens while the parents toil. This clause depends on the rest of the sentence to complete it—and I see that the second part of the sentence is an independent clause with a subject and verb. It could be its own complete sentence. I will circle the dependent clause and underline the dependent clause. Underline the independent clause and circle the dependent clause.

Read sentence 2. Say: This time, I see that the sentence begins with an independent clause. The clause “these kids meet their peers at local hangouts” could be a complete sentence. (Underline the clause.) Then I see the clause “when they could be doing something more useful,” which on its own doesn’t tell me what they are doing. This is a dependent clause. Circle the clause.
2. Rehearse

Practice Identifying Parts of Complex Sentences

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to work with partners to identify the independent and dependent clause in each sentence. (Students do not need to copy the sentences.)

1. When September comes around, students must spend time reviewing the knowledge they lost over the summer.
2. While they could be focusing on new skills, teachers have to spend at least a month reviewing information.

Share Parts of Complex Sentences

Invite volunteers to come to the chart and underline the independent clause in each sentence. Ask them to circle the dependent clauses. Discuss their responses by asking the following questions:
• How did you identify the dependent and independent clauses?
• How can you tell if a sentence is a complete sentence?

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that complex sentences are sentences that include one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. When you use complex sentences in your persuasive essays, you need to make sure that you have an independent clause that provides a subject for the sentence as a whole. Being able to use complex sentences will allow you to vary your sentences and make your writing more interesting.

If you would like to give students additional practice with complex sentences, have them complete BLM 5.

4. Share

Review and provide corrective feedback based on students’ answers to BLM 5. Ask students to share what they learned about complex sentences.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Beginning ELs are not ready to work on this English grammar skill. While other students collaborate on the partner activity or write independently, meet one on one with students to support developmentally appropriate grammar skills based on their independent writing and language level. For example, you may want to work with students on checking complete sentences for nouns and verbs.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair students with fluent English speakers to complete the practice sentences. Provide the following sentence frames to assist students with oral vocabulary:

_____ is an independent clause.
_____ is a dependent clause.