Complex Sentences

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Identify independent clauses in complex sentences.
• Identify dependent clauses in complex sentences.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Complex Sentences (BLM 7)
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text (without the circles and underlining) and the practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs“ onto chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain Complex Sentences

Write the following sentence: While their parents watch, students bid farewell to their teachers. Say: This sentence is a complex sentence. It has one independent clause and one dependent clause. The words “students bid farewell to their teachers” form an independent clause. It can stand by itself as a sentence. The words “while their parents watch” form a dependent clause. A dependent clause contains a subject and verb, but it still can’t stand by itself as a sentence. It depends on words from the rest of the sentence to complete it, and it usually has a dependent marker word that makes the sentence incomplete on its own. In this example sentence, there is a subject (parents) and a verb (watch), but the word while makes this clause dependent. What happens while the parents watch? The thought is incomplete. Independent clauses can appear at the beginning, middle, or end of a complex sentence. 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.

1. Whether they go to a day camp or an overnight camp, camp is a special experience for children.

2. Because they face economic challenges, some schools no longer offer sports programs.

Modeling Text

Read sentence 1. Say: I see a dependent clause at the start of this sentence. The words “whether they go to a day camp or an overnight camp” do not make a complete sentence because it is not a complete thought; I don’t know what is true whether kids go to a day or overnight camp. At the end of the complex sentence I see the independent clause “camp is a special experience for children.” Circle the dependent clause and underline the independent clause.

Read sentence 2. Say: In this sentence, the words “some schools no longer offer sports programs” form an independent clause. (Underline this clause.) The words “Because they face economic challenges” is a dependent clause. From reading it alone, I don’t know what’s true because schools face economic challenges. I will circle it. Writers use complex sentences in their persuasive essays to add details to their arguments.
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. Not only do young people improve their fitness level, but they gain valuable self-esteem.
2. In the time they spend on the team, they learn to get along with all kinds of people.

Practice Text

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 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, be sure to use ones that are complete, or ones that include an independent clause and at least one dependent clause. Being able to use complex sentences will allow you to vary your sentences and make your essays more interesting.

If you would like to give students additional practice with complex sentences, have them complete BLM 7.

4. Share

Review and provide corrective feedback based on students’ answers to BLM 7. 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 a noun and verb.

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.