

Dependent Modifiers YOU SHOULD KNOW

Name _____

1. **Present participial phrases** (Phrases that begin with “ing” verbs and act as adjectives that modify the action.)

The pack of rabid dogs, barking and biting and ripping the office furniture to shreds, forced the veterinarians to run, shrieking, for their lives.

Smashing the ball back over the net, Venus Williams assured the victory over her exhausted opponent, who slumped to the ground, unable to attempt a return.

The madman sat calmly in his chair, chatting pleasantly with the policemen, knowing as he did that they would never find the body of the old man stuffed beneath the floorboards.

2. **Appositives** (Nouns or noun-phrases which restate or further identify the noun which directly precedes them.):

Arnold Schwarzenegger, a former bodybuilder and famous Hollywood star, claims his experience playing action heroes qualifies him to be the governor of California.

Mr. Jones, world-famous scientist, avid triathlete, and single father of five, never had time to eat breakfast.

I once had a truly amazing pet, a dog who could juggle bowling balls while riding a unicycle.

3. **Relative clauses** (Clauses starting with “who” or “which”)

The cheese, which only the day before had been a cheery golden yellow, now was crawling with a blue-green mold.

Gray Davis, who exudes the charm and charisma of a block of wood, was the first governor in California history to be recalled.

Americans spend millions of dollars each week on *The Weekly World News*, which brings them the latest reliable information on space alien invasions and the current whereabouts of Elvis.

4. **Absolutes** (Absolutes have both a subject and a verb of their own, with the verb in the form of a present or past participle. Absolutes give background information about some aspect of the independent clause. Forms of the verb “to be” are sometimes omitted, as in the fifth example below.)

The high diver, his back bending almost to the point of breaking, performed a triple backflip that won him the gold medal.

Terrified by the horror movie, John ran out of the movie theater screaming, his hair standing on end.

Clinging to a sharp outcropping of rock, her right ankle wrenched and her right shoulder cut to the bone, Maria prayed the rescue helicopters would arrive on time.

We suspected that Dave, his muscles as thick as a gorilla’s and his temper starting to flare, was taking steroids.

The protestors surged forwards, hatred in their eyes, rocks in their hands.

5. **Adjective phrases** (A phrase which modifies a noun or pronoun.)

Noisy as a herd of stampeding rhinos, the students ran out of the classroom the moment the bell rang, eager to escape the hell of their grammar lesson.

Tired, hungry, coated with dust, and desperate to be home with their families, the soldiers wished for a speedy end to the war.

Her blind date, balding, acne-ridden, foul-mouthed, and malodorous, was not quite the Greek god her roommate had described to her.

6. Prepositional phrases (Start with words like “in,” “under,” “behind,” “over,” “through,” “with,” etc. Usually indicate **place** or **time**.)

At precisely one o’clock every morning, the strange noise echoed through my room, from behind the closet door and from under my bed.

Down in his basement, using parts from his parents’ broken-down washer and dryer, Carlos built himself a time machine.

7. Subordinate clauses (Subordinate clauses have their **own subject and main verb**, but start with a word that makes the subject and main verb **dependent on the independent clause**. Subordinate clauses usually start with subordinate conjunctions, like “although,” “because,” or “while.” They may also start with phrases like “despite the fact that.”)

Although my mother had commanded me to stay in the house after dark, I kept sneaking out to meet Julio down by the schoolyard.

The other Iron Man competitors trained day and night, swimming and biking for miles and eating nothing but egg whites and soy beans, while I lay on my couch watching soaps and eating Doritos.

(Note: Subordinate clauses starting with “because” are NOT separated off by a comma, as in “I refuse to do my homework because I believe algebra is immoral.” Why doesn’t “because” take a comma? Who the heck knows. English is weird.)

8. Similes (An **adjective phrase** that makes a comparison using “like” or “as.”)

After he was stung by the bees, his face began to swell, like a slowly-inflating red balloon.

John, as fast as a greyhound after a rabbit, raced for the finish line.

9. Parallel phrases (Phrases which **echo the grammatical structure** that comes before them. Technically, if they echo the subject or main verb of the independent clause, they are part of the independent clause. However, we’ll treat them like cumulative sentences because they have the same rhythm, and they’ll be equally useful to you in avoiding choppy writing.)

A newly developed styrene-butadiene rubber (SBR) lasts longer, resists ozone oxidation better, and costs only slightly more to produce than conventional SBR, the most common synthetic elastomer.

(from *Chemical and Engineering News*, February 4, 1991)

He loved Berkeley for the rolling foothills and the blue expanse of the bay, the variety of independently-owned bookstores, the ease of obtaining delicious Thai food, and the opportunity to take a Bikram Yoga class on virtually any street corner.

10. Resumptive modifiers (Similar to appositives, these actually **repeat a term from a previous phrase**, giving more specific information about it. You can have pairs of resumptive modifiers restating pairs of terms, as in the second example below.)

In high school, I expect to take a wide variety of classes, classes which will teach me about the nature of the universe, classes which will teach me how to read poetry, and classes which will put me to sleep.

Breaking up with Zelda was both good and bad for me, good in that I no longer have to live in fear of her sudden urges to set fire to the drapes or assemble explosive devices in the microwave, but bad in that my life is nowhere near as exciting as it once was.