

Shoebox

GRAMMAR



The Main Clause lesson

Introduction

The Main Clause is the central building block of the entire English language. Every complete English sentence in existence has a Main Clause as its core, so it is vital that we teach it first. In this way, students will always have it as their default building block for writing and speaking, and they will be able to use it with confidence. For those languages especially where word order is different, such as Japanese, or those languages where words are implied and therefore omitted, this basic foundational structure is the compulsory starting point for every Shoebox course.

Furthermore, it means that the teacher and student both share this common understanding of a Main Clause, which then allows the teacher to use it as a standard when assessing students' work.

It is also important to note that the Main Clause is not the same thing as a sentence. A Main Clause is the same as a Simple Sentence, indeed, but not the same as a Compound or a Complex Sentence. Therefore, it is important that you teach the students to call it a Main Clause, not a Sentence.

Because the Main Clause is so vitally important in setting up a student's knowledge and control of the English language, ensure that you follow the methodology closely throughout, and refer back to it wherever necessary.



Preparation and terminology

Cards

First, you will need to download, print and laminate enough **Main Clause** cards for every student in your class. There are two different types of Main Clause card.

The first is this single card, without different levels, that shows the positive, negative and question forms, as below. Print and laminate this card on A3, but only use it for your own reference and for students who request it. Incorporate this card into lessons more as students start to use more negative and question forms.

		Position One The Noun House 	The Noun always lives here Sometimes his friends visit	Position Two The Verb House 	The Full Verb always lives here Sometimes her friends visit	Position Three The Holiday House 	The Noun and his friends sometimes visit The Full Verb never visits
+							
		Noun (+ friends)		Full Verb (+ friends)		extra information	
-							
		Noun (+ friends)		be verb	not		extra information
				be auxiliary	not	present participle	extra information
				do auxiliary	not	base verb	extra information
				have auxiliary	not	past participle	extra information
			Modal	not	base verb	extra information	
?							
	Question word (Wh-)	be verb	Noun (+ friends)				extra information
		be auxiliary	Noun (+ friends)		present participle		extra information
		do auxiliary	Noun (+ friends)		base verb		extra information
		have auxiliary	Noun (+ friends)		past participle		extra information
	Modal	Noun (+ friends)		base verb		extra information	

The second group is graded, with three level of details, from very simple (Level 1) to very detailed (Level 3). This is the card your students will use in this and future lessons. Choose the one you think is appropriate for your class. Then count your students, divide by two, and this is the number of A3 pages that you print in landscape format. Once these are printed, laminate them all and then cut horizontally. Then you should have enough cards for every student in your class.

Markers

You will also need dry-erase markers and something to clean off the cards. In the past, teachers and students have used eucalyptus oil, erasers or tissues. Since manufacturers use different ink compounds in their markers, no single method works all the time. Experiment until you find one that works. If cards become too soiled over time, print and laminate more.

Groups

Make sure you organise your students into groups of a maximum of three so that quieter or lower-level students do not become mere observers rather than participants. With low-level students, it may be better to group them according to common languages so that they can at least use their mother tongue to compare notes. You may also want to pair a higher level student with a lower-level partner to elicit teaching between them.

Dictionaries and translators

Some students may need mother tongue dictionaries or translators. While some teaching systems dissuade these, Shoebox encourages them as they are a stepping stone to important and necessary vocabulary, particularly for lower levels. Lessons might take some time if students are checking new words, but it is all learning!

Mother tongues

There is debate about whether students should use their mother tongues in a class. At higher levels, there may be little need, but at lower levels, students may have no other way of communicating. It's a judgment call. Where a mother tongue conversation will enhance learning, permit it. Where it will not, encourage English instead.

Equipment

You may want to use a smartboard or document camera to make the Main Clause Card file large and visible for all students. If you don't have such equipment, just gather your students around a central table where they can all see your Main Clause card.

You will also need some attractive pictures of people on holidays or holiday places.

Terminology

The Main Clause is a structure that covers quite a wide range of meaning: actions (We **went** to Paris on holiday), feelings (I **really love** my family), thoughts (He **thinks** English is easy to learn), and states of existence (She **is** an amazing teacher).

It was therefore not possible to use the term Main **Action** to define the Main Clause, as it would exclude the thoughts, feelings and states of being and possibly confuse students.

The term **Main Idea** was chosen carefully as an idea is what comes from the student. It is the student's internal concept of actions, thoughts, feelings and states of being.

Lastly, all Shoebox documents use the pronouns *he* and *she* interchangeably. Neither gender is favoured, intentionally or otherwise.

Purpose and duration



If students have a purpose for any lesson, it gives them something to aim at and something to get excited about. In this lesson, students will be learning the single most important building block for everything else they ever learn in English, so it is very important that you tell them the significance of what they are about to do.

Achievements	Students will achieve these goals	<i>Identify the Three Houses as component parts of the Main Clause.</i>
		<i>Write at least five Main Clauses including the common verbs be, go, come, have, take, make.</i>
		<i>Speak their five Main Clauses.</i>
		<i>Use capital letters and fullstops to protect the Main Clause.</i>
		<i>Use basic time phrases as Dependent Clauses for their Main Clauses.</i>

Duration	This lesson is vitally important and should not be rushed. Allow an hour for lower level students, although more capable students can do it in less time according to your judgement.
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Consolidation	Repeat and consolidate this lesson frequently. Refer back to the Main Clause card whenever students need to consolidate.
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Process

The standard Shoebox lesson process has five equally important steps for students to follow (and for teachers to teach), as follows.

This is my	Relevant story	I need to tell.
These are the	Visual tools	I use to tell it.
This is the	Mental key	to help me remember the structure.
These are the	Practice opportunities	I need to use it and improve.
This is the	Assessment device	I need to test it.

When we apply this (slightly modified) process to the Main Clause, it looks like this.

This is my	Main Idea	I need to write or say.
This is the	Main Clause	I use to write or say it.
This is the	capital letter and fullstop	I need to protect it.
This is the	Mental key	to help me remember the structure.
These are the	Practice opportunities	I need to use it and improve.
This is the	Assessment device	I need to test it.

And when we apply that to this lesson, it transforms into this.

This is my	Holiday (Main Idea)	I need to write about.
These are the	Main Clauses	I use to write about it.
These are the	capital letters and fullstops	I need to protect the Main Clauses.
This is the	Mental key	to help me remember the structure.
These are the	Practice opportunities	I need to use it and improve.
This is the	Assessment device	I need to test it.

Let's now look at this in detail.

1	This is the The Relevant Story	<i>... I need to write</i>
	My last holiday	

All Shoebox lessons start with a Relevant Story, something that is important in students' lives and something that they want to tell. If a story is relevant and important to a student, she will most likely remember it better as she will tell it frequently and with pleasure.

In this case, the story is their last holiday, in whichever form that might take: long and expensive, like a round the world first class trip including safaris, skiing and cruising, or short and cheap, like a stay-at-home holiday watching TV and reading books. A picnic in the park or a day at the beach with friends could even be a holiday. Holidays, because they are usually pleasant, are easy and fun to remember, and will therefore move from working memory to long-term memory much faster.

The first step is to get them thinking about a holiday each student experienced, and it could be the most recent holiday or one more distant. You can do this in a number of ways: write the words *Your holiday* on the board, show them pictures of people on holidays, or write the names of local places where they might go to relax.

Once they have all chosen a holiday, they need to signify this to you in some way.

1	This is the The Relevant Story	<i>... I need to write</i>
	My last holiday = My Main Ideas	

Next, you need to make the link between holidays and the Main Idea. It is important to tell students here that a holiday is not a single Main Idea but many, hence the title above. Students write or say many Main Ideas in order to describe their holiday.

It is always good in Shoebox methodology to present a situation for which students do not have the answer, and then to make them *desire* the answer. Therefore, ask the questions

How are you going to write or talk about your holiday?	<i>You will get a variety of answers here. If one is the Main Clause, celebrate!</i>
What building block do you need to write about / talk about every single action, thought and feeling (we'll leave out states of being here for now).	<i>Again, you will get a variety of answers. If one is the Main Clause, celebrate!</i>
Do you want to know?	<i>Of course, Teacher!</i>
First, what name do we give to every single action, thought and feeling?	<i>Again, you will get a variety of answers. If one is the Main Clause, celebrate!</i>
We call an action, thought or feeling the <i>Main Idea</i>	
How do we write the Main Idea?	<i>Again, you will get a variety of answers. If one is the Main Clause, celebrate!</i>

Write the words *My Main Idea* on the board and ask students to name them in their own languages. You might want to draw a face with a glowing lightbulb above it if you have artistic skills.

		
My Main Idea		

Ask the question, "I need to write or say my Main Idea. How do I do it?" Elicit student responses without giving the answer.

Then write the *equals* sign and the words *Main Clause* next to it.

		
<p>My Main Idea</p>	<p>=</p>	<p>Main Clause</p>

Point to the lightbulb graphic and say, "Now you are going to write about your holiday. Your holiday has many Main Ideas. For every Main Idea, you need a Main Clause."

Mental training

Now students have the first and most important building block of English. This is their first mental process.

I Need to express my Main Idea
I Choose a Main Clause

Here is the first thing that Shoebox students learn, that they need to express a Main Idea with a Main Clause. Have them repeat it after you, tell their partners, make a song / rap / dance out of it, and any other games or activities that help consolidate this.

Then point to the question mark and say "So what is a Main Clause?"

2	This is the Visual Structure	<i>... I need to write</i>
	My Main Ideas	

Whatever level class you have, you should start with the following question-answer sequences. Lower level students will learn the basic building blocks of the language, and even higher-level students will gain either new and valuable insights or a chance for revision.

Project the Main Clause image onto the class screen if you have one. If you have no screen, gather the students around the Main Clause card on a table. Make sure your students can see the Main Clause card on the screen or table. Don't hand out Main Clause cards yet or students will be distracted. They need to follow with you closely on the sequence.

Colours, Numbers and Names

Write the words *Noun* and *Verb* on the board and have students check the meanings in their own mother tongues. Ask the questions below and elicit the answers. If students don't answer quickly, give them time. Repeat the question, emphasizing the key word, or even *point* to the key word.

What are these colours? (point to the colours in turn on the card) *Yellow, Green, Red.*

What are the numbers? (pointing) *One, Two, Three.*

What is this thing? *A house.*

What is the name of this House? *The Noun House.*

What is the name of this House? *The Verb House.*

What is the name of this House? *The Holiday House (American teachers can use the word **vacation** interchangeably, although it is wise to stay consistent with the words on the cards.)*

Where does the Main Clause start? *At the Noun House.*

How do I show the start of a Main Clause? *With a capital letter.*

Where does the Main Clause finish? *At the Holiday House.*

How do I know that? *Because the red colour tells me to stop.*

How do I show the finish of a Main Clause? *With a fullstop. (American teachers can use the word **period** interchangeably.)*

Which way does the Main Clause go? (point to the arrow next to the words *Main Idea*). From left to right.

Always and ***sometimes, live*** and ***visit***.

Write these four words on the board and have students check the meanings in their own mother tongues. Then ask the questions.

Who lives in the Noun House? *The Noun*.

Does he always live there? *Yes*.

Who sometimes visits the Noun House? *The Noun's friends*.

Who lives in the Verb House? *The Verb*.

Does she always live there? *Yes*.

Who sometimes visits the Verb House? *The Verb's friends*.

Who always lives in the Holiday House? *No-one*.

Who sometimes visits the Holiday House? *The Noun and his friends*.

Does the Verb visit the Holiday House? *No*.

Do the Verb's friends visit the Holiday House? *Sometimes, yes*.

Mental training

Now students have three things to remember. Write the third one under the first two as a kind of incremental learning sequence.

I need to express my Main Idea
I choose a Main Clause
The Main Clause has Three Houses



3	These are the markers . . . <i>I need to protect my Main Clause</i>
	Capital letter and fullstop

Although students have learned the first two steps in the process, we are not done yet. The next step - **Protect** - is perhaps best explained with a visual story that expands on the metaphor of Main Clause Avenue with its Three Houses. My chosen story is below, but please use whatever metaphor fits best for you. You can also tell this story, or yours, with as much flair and elaboration as you like, but make sure you get the main idea in of protection on both sides.

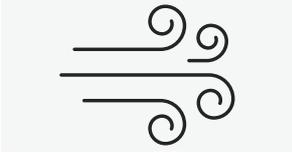
Let's imagine that Main Clause Avenue is a pretty windy place. For as long as anyone can remember, there has been a constant wind blowing, but only in one direction, starting out from the left of the Noun House, blowing across the Verb House and the Holiday House, and then out into the wild grammatical forests.

A long time ago, the residents of Main Clause Avenue decided that they needed some protection from this never-ending wind, so they decided to put up two protective structures, one to the left of the Noun House and one to the right of the Holiday House. The wind was stronger to the left of the Noun House, so the Noun wanted something big and strong there, but the Holiday House didn't need as much protection, and it was sometimes empty, so the residents decided that just a low fence there would be fine. The residents also realised that the wind blew over the top of the Houses in a rather straight jet stream, which meant that they didn't need to put up any fences between the Houses.

Can you see where this is going?

Main Clause	
<i>Metaphor</i>	<i>Reality</i>
<i>The wind</i>	the way we read our sentences, from left to right. (The arrow on each of the cards → shows this direction.)
<i>The large protective fence to the left of the Noun House</i>	the capital letter.
<i>The low fence to the right of the Holiday House</i>	the fullstop.
<i>The lack of fences between the Houses</i>	no fullstops, commas or semi-colons within the Main Clause.

Let's summarise these first with a graphic.

Main Clause				
Noun House		Verb House		Holiday House
				
Capital letter	Noun	Verb	(optional)	fullstop
CL		MC		
				
				

and then with a written summary.

***The Main Clause is a beautiful and precious thing that needs to be protected.
I must protect the first word of the Main Clause with a capital letter.
I must protect the last word of the Main Clause with a fullstop.
I don't need to protect the middle of the Main Clause with commas.***

Before we continue, please note that this idea of protection also works with negative Main Clauses, and it also works for question Main Clauses, for which we use a question mark instead of a fullstop.

4	This is the mental key	<i>... I need to help me remember</i>
	If I want to write my Main Idea, I must use the Main Clause	

Now summarise all of this with this memory trigger.

If I want to write my Main Idea, I must use the Main Clause.

Develop this as a catchphrase that you say often in class, at random moments, when greeting and farewelling students, and especially when they are writing.



5	This is the Practice	<i>... I need to help me improve</i>
	Introduction	

In Shoebox, practice is not done with worksheets. Ever. Worksheets are completely and inexorably alien to the Shoebox System as they require mostly lower-level thinking from the students. Instead, you should provide frequent opportunities for students use higher level thinking as they convert their own **relevant** mother tongue stories into English using the **visual, colour-coded** tools you have provided. As they practise, they also use and strengthen the **mental keys and processes**, thus allowing their knowledge and skills to move from working memory to long-term memory.

This practice can take three forms: partner testing, writing and speaking. All three are valid forms of practice, and all demonstrate student knowledge in different ways.

5	This is the Practice	<i>... I need to help me improve</i>
	Partner teaching	

Another example of higher order thinking is teaching. Students are in the classroom to learn, so asking them to teach their partners might take some by surprise. However, I have told my students many times, *When you teach, you learn*. Teaching also requires them to assemble all the component parts of the lesson in their minds, as well as in the right order, and then to add some persuasion and life to their delivery to convince their partner. It's a powerful method to keep students engaged and also to help them learn.

First, though, it is wise for you to teach the sequence in its entirety so that students can see it as a whole.

When students are ready, draw their attention back to the whiteboard, and start by writing the simple sentence **Luis went to school**. on the board, where **Luis** is the name of one of your students. Use this question-answer sequence. Always give enough time for students to answer, repeat the question several times to give students a chance to answer, and work on the principle that eliciting is always better than telling.

Where do we start? (*wave your hand over the three Houses and wait*) *In the Noun House.*

Write **Luis** in the Noun House.

Is Luis a Noun? *Yes.*

Why? *Because it is in the Noun House.*

What is the next word? (If there is no response, point to it.) *went.*

What does it mean? *You can mime walking here, or have students check the word **went** in their mother tongue dictionaries.*

Is this a Verb? *Yes.*

Why? *Because it is in the Verb House*

What are the next words? *to school. Again, mime, draw or show a picture of school and have students check the word in their dictionaries. You could also draw a simple picture of Luis walking or driving to school, or use an arrow pointing to school and the word to above the arrow..*

What do we write at the end of the Main Clause? *A fullstop / period.*

What are these words called together? *A Main Clause.*

Why do I need a Main Clause? *To write my Main Idea.*

Is my Main Idea / Main Clause precious? *Yes.*

How do I protect the beginning of my Main Idea / Main Clause? *With a capital letter.*

How do I protect the end of my Main Idea / Main Clause? *With a fullstop.*

Do I need to protect the middle of my Main Idea / Main Clause with commas? *No.*



Following the lesson sequence outlined earlier, make sure you celebrate victories, no matter how small. Repeat words, points or even the whole sequence where necessary. Time is not critical here. Watch for students frowning, a good sign of a lack of understanding.

When you are confident that students have some understanding, erase the sentence from the board and ask a student to come up and help you, or to teach the class (alone, as you stand silently by) in either English or a shared mother tongue, or perhaps to write the words into the structure in answer to your questions. Celebrate successes happily. Repeat with other students if necessary.

Now, it's time for students to teach each other. Make sure all students have their Main Clause cards close at hand and give them a few moments to organise their thoughts and *teaching plan*.

Once they have started, wander and eavesdrop frequently to check for understanding. If one student is making a mistake, stop and quietly correct. If several or most are making the same mistake, press **Pause** on the whole class and correct the error with the group before students resume teaching their partners.

Celebrate successes enthusiastically.



5	This is the Practice	<i>... I need to help me improve</i>
	Writing	

In the Shoebox System, the first kind of Practice that students usually start with is Writing, and this is because the student then has a physical, permanent record of his work - Main Clauses in this case - on the page before him. He knows what he has done, and his writing demonstrates his thinking. If he has made any mistakes, they are visible and evident on the page for a partner to see and hopefully correct.

Therefore, at this point, with formal (and partner) teaching of the key points of the Main Clause complete, it is time for students to experiment and insert their own experiences into the Main Clause. You asked students earlier to remember their holidays, and now they are going to write those memories on the page.

They are going to write about their holidays under the following limitations.

Firstly, they can use the Main Clause only. If they want to add a time phrase, they must add this as part of the Holiday house, not before the Noun House. (That comes in the next lesson.)

Secondly, they must write all verbs in the Past Simple. They can use the Regular and Irregular Verb charts for this.

Thirdly, if they are unfamiliar with English verbs, they can write verbs in their own language and use a translator or dictionary to convert them into English.

Lastly, they use the Common Verbs chart if they want to experiment with verbs like *be, go, come, have, get, take, make*.

Distribute Main Clause cards, felt tip pens and erasing devices, and students will also need their own pens and paper.



Students should follow this process.

1	Write a Main Clause on the laminated Main Clause card, ensuring that the Noun House and Verb House are occupied.
2	Protect the Main Clause with capital letter and fullstop.
3	Transcribe Main Clause to writing paper.
4	Check, erase and repeat.

Students should work alone here as they all have their own Main Ideas and need to express these individually.

Key points

Main Clause	Students must start every Main Clause with a Noun. They must not start with time phrases yet. That will happen soon, but not in this lesson.
Noun House	It is very likely here that they will use <i>I</i> a lot as their Noun House Noun. However, some students might try variations on <i>My friends and I</i> such as <i>Friends and I, I and friends, me and friends, friends and me</i> . Since English is a polite language and puts others first, the correct form is <i>My friends and I</i> .
Verb House	Students might experiment with a variety of verbs, though, and you can introduce them here to some of the Shoebox Supplementary Resources such as the Irregular Verbs chart, Regular Verb endings chart and others.
Holiday House	This is the optional House. It is likely that students will write something here, but it is fine if they do not. Some students might write time phrases here.
Punctuation	Remind students constantly of the need to protect their Main Clauses with the appropriate markers: a capital letter to protect the first word in the Main Clause and a fullstop to protect the last word.

Some students will be more adventurous than others and will decide to explore and use the Supplementary Resource cards. When this happens, demonstrate how these resource cards work with individual students or several students in a group if the situation demands. If it appears that the whole class would like the same card, press **Pause** on the lesson and explain the card as quickly as possible, remembering that the main focus of the lesson is writing Main Clauses.

You might also use the Supplementary Resources from the lesson web page.

Celebrate successes.

5	This is the Practice	<i>... I need to help me improve</i>
	Speaking	

After students have done their Writing in this lesson, Speaking is a chance for them to read out their Main Clauses to a partner. The benefits of this are several.

Firstly, when students hear their own voices speaking out their Main Clauses, they make the mental link between what the words look like and what the words sound like. It's not worth distracting them too much with pronunciation practice here as the main focus is the Main Clause. However, if a pronunciation error appears repeatedly, it is worth correcting it with the whole class.

Secondly, it prepares them for the real world, where they tell their stories and experiences in social, educational, work and other situations. You can prepare students for this by beginning these student-student interactions with one student asking the question, "What did you do on your holiday?"

Thirdly, it gives partners a chance to practise listening skills, albeit subconsciously.

Fourthly, it gives the students a safe setting to practise their speaking and thus build confidence. The world can be an unforgiving place for students with limited ability in English.

Instruct students to ask their partners, "What did you do?"

Students can then read out their holiday story to their partners, who must listen for two purposes. Firstly, they should congratulate effort and encourage their partners at all times. Secondly, they should check for any errors and offer advice based on the Main Clause card. If they are not sure how to fix the problem, they should check with you.

6	This is the Assessment	<i>... I need to help me test it</i>
	Several different methods	

Assessment and teaching are just two different sides of the same coin. You should assess what you teach for two reasons. Firstly, it tells you what students have learned, but it also tells you how well you have taught.

You can assess in several different ways, and all are valid. Choose whichever suits you.

Firstly, the traditional way is to collect up papers and mark them out of class. This is good because it gives you time to check over students' work outside the busy-ness of class. However, it also distances the student from the moment in which she wrote her piece of writing, and therefore may lose some impact. If you use this method, date each paper, keep a copy of it on file (paper or digital) and possibly add your own comments or graphic symbol as evidence of your pleasure. For years, I used to draw a smiling face that (vaguely) resembled my own face when I was pleased with a student's work, and students actually treasured these and counted the number they had earned!

Secondly, it is often worth doing an exercise in higher order thinking to both strengthen the concepts in students' minds and also assess what they know. Erase everything from the whiteboard, turn off the smartboard and remove Main Clause cards from students. Then ask them, with partners or alone, to re-draw the card with as much detail and information as they can remember. They should use English words, but can use mother tongue words where necessary. They should also write down as many of the main points as they can remember, including the mental process.

Thirdly, ask students to mark their partner's work. This will stimulate memory, engage higher order thinking, and also draw attention to you should, of course, celebrate achievement when you call time.

Fourthly, make sure that assessment is NOT punishment. Assessment should be seen as a means by which students can *improve*, and so the diligent student will actually ask you for opportunities to be assessed as these give him the chance to demonstrate his skills and knowledge.

Conclusion

The lesson is over, but the learning is not. Students have just learned how to express the Main Idea with the Main Clause, the single most important building block in English. In the next lesson, they will learn how to add a Supporting Idea expressed in a Dependent Clause.

Repeat or consolidate this lesson often and wherever necessary, not only at lower levels. Higher level students who have not been taught the Main Clause usually write by instinct, but are sometimes unable to self-correct when they make errors with the Main Clause.

A basic structure like this one is a firm foundation for all English learning.



