

The “I Know That” Test

Finding Independent Clauses

All sentences contain an independent clause, which is a portion of a sentence that has a **subject**, a **verb**, and forms a complete thought. A **subject** is a noun that is doing or being something in the sentence. A **verb** is what the subject is doing or being. A complete thought means that the reader can understand the sentence on its own without needing any of the other words around it. That sounds simple, but sometimes figuring out whether a group of words is an independent clause can still be tricky.

The “I know that” test is here to help. Here’s how it works:

- 1) Find the group of words you want to test
- 2) Put the words “I know that” before the group of words from Step 1
- 3) Read over the new sentence to see if it makes sense
 - a. If “I know that” + the group of words makes sense without any other information, then it is an independent clause
 - b. If “I know that” + the group of words doesn’t make sense without any other information, then it’s not an independent clause

Group of words being tested	“I know that” test	Does it make sense?	Is it an independent clause?
<u>I did my homework.</u>	I know that <u>I did my homework.</u>	Yes	Yes
<u>The dog is hungry.</u>	I know that <u>the dog is hungry.</u>	Yes	Yes
<u>Dove into the ocean.</u>	I know that <u>dove into the ocean.</u>	No	No
<u>Lisa’s beautiful smile.</u>	I know that <u>Lisa’s beautiful smile.</u>	No	No

Finding and Fixing Fragments

A fragment is an incomplete thought with a period at the end. Since incomplete thoughts and fragments can’t function as sentences on their own, a period doesn’t belong after them. If you test a fragment using the “I know that” test, it won’t make sense, so you know you don’t need a period. The test can also make it easier to see what’s missing when you do have a fragment and what you need to change to make it a sentence.

Suspected Fragment	I know that test	Does it make sense?	Is it a fragment?	What’s missing?	New Sentence
<u>Ran to Joan.</u>	I know that <u>ran to Joan.</u>	No	Yes	Subject: who ran to Joan?	<u>Dave’s puppy ran to Joan</u>
<u>Dave’s puppy.</u>	I know that <u>Dave’s puppy.</u>	No	Yes	Verb: What was Dave’s puppy doing?	<u>Dave’s puppy ran.</u>

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Why Does the “I Know That” Test Work?

The “I know that” test is easy to remember and it works by using one of the rules for combining independent clauses. “I know” is an independent clause; “I” is the subject and “know” is the verb. You can see that it also passes the “I know that” test: I know that I know. There are several ways to put two or more independent clauses in a sentence together, and one of those is using what’s called a subordinating conjunction. “That” is a subordinating conjunction, so the test works by combining an existing independent clause (I know) with a subordinating conjunction (that) and the words you want to test.

When Doesn’t the “I Know That” Test Work?

There are a few where the “I know that” doesn’t work: questions and commands. Both questions and commands put words in a different order than normal (declarative) sentences, and that keeps the test from working properly.

Group of words being tested	I know that test	Does it make sense?	Is it a sentence?
<u>Why are you sad?</u>	I know that <u>why</u> are you sad?	No	Yes
<u>Do your homework.</u>	I know that <u>do</u> your homework	No	Yes