Conjunctions are parts of speech that connect words, phrases, clauses, or other parts of a sentence together. This handout will teach you how to correctly use conjunctions.

## Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions are **single words** that join two or more items of equal grammatical function: subjects with subjects, verbs with verbs, objects with objects, and independent clauses with independent clauses.

An easy way to remember coordinating conjunctions is with the mnemonic **FANBOYS**: “for,” “and,” “nor,” “but,” “or,” “yet,” “so.”

### For

Use “for” when presenting a reason or explanation—the cause half of a cause-and-effect relationship.

**Example**: I am very tired, **for** I did not sleep well last night.

**Note**: “For” links two independent clauses: “I am very tired” and “I did not sleep well last night.”

### And

Use “and” to link items of similar standing within the sentence.

**Example**: I ate the cake **and** the ice cream.

**Note**: “And” links the two direct objects of the verb “ate”: “the cake” and “the ice cream.”

### Nor

Use “nor” to link negative items of similar standing within the sentence.

**Example**: The man is not a gentleman **nor** is he a scholar.

**Note**: “Nor” links two independent clauses: “This man is not a gentleman” and “is he a scholar.”

### But

Use “but” when presenting an exemption or contradiction.

**Example**: We love cats **but** hate dogs.

**Note**: “But” links two verbs and their direct objects: “love cats” and “hate dogs.”
Or
Use “or” when introducing an alternative.

Example: She would like a cat, dog, or snake.

Note: “Or” links the three direct objects of the verb “like”: “cat,” “dog,” and “snake.”

Yet
Use “yet” when presenting an exemption or contradiction.

Example: Sam enjoys mustard yet dislikes brown mustard

Note: “Yet” links two verbs and their objects: “enjoys mustard” and “dislikes brown mustard.”

So
Use “so” when presenting a consequence—the effect half of a cause-and-effect relationship.

Example: I am exhausted, so I am taking a nap.

Note: “So” links two independent clauses: “I am exhausted” and “I am taking a nap.”

**Correlative Conjunctions**

Correlative conjunctions are pairs of words that join two or more items of equal grammatical function: subjects with subjects, verbs with verbs, objects with objects, and independent clauses with independent clauses.

**Either…Or**
Use “either…or” to present a set of contrasting options.

Example: Either drink your milk or go to bed!

Note: “Either…or” joins a verb with its direct object and a verb with an associated prepositional phrase: “drink your milk” and “go to bed.”

**Neither…Nor**
Use “neither…nor” to present a set of negative options.

Example: Neither hunger nor thirst stopped her from beating the new Legend of Zelda.

Note: “Neither…nor” links two subjects: “hunger” and “thirst.”

**Not Only…But (Also)**
Use “not only…but also” to emphasize additional information.

Example: I will watch not only Star Wars but also Star Trek.

Note: “Not only…but also” links two direct objects: “Star Wars” and “Star Trek.”

**Both…And**
Use “both…and” to signify two related items.
Example: I’ll have both the chicken and the fish.

*Note:* “Both...and” links two direct objects: “chicken” and “fish.”

**Whether...Or**

Use “whether...or” to present alternative conditions or outcomes.

Example: **Whether** you run in the marathon or not is entirely up to you.

*Note:* “Whether...or” links two phrases acting subjects: “you run in the marathon” and “not”, which is a shortened version of “you do not run in the marathon.”

### Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions join an independent clause and a dependent (i.e., subordinate) clause.

There are numerous subordinating conjunctions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subordinating Conjunctions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As far as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As long as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As soon as</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When joining a dependent clause to the end of your independent clause, do not use a comma with the conjunction.

Example: I have to get plenty of rest **because** I have a big day tomorrow.

*Note:* “I have a big day tomorrow” is a subordinate clause.

If the dependent clause comes before your independent clause, use a comma at the end of the dependent clause.

Example: **Since** I have a big day tomorrow, I have to get plenty of rest.

*Note:* For more information on clauses, please see our handout on this topic.

### Common Issues

**Commas and Conjunctions**

There are two times when you need to use a comma with a conjunction.

The **first** is when you are presenting a list of three or more items. Use a comma between each item and before the conjunction. The comma before the conjunction is called the Oxford or serial comma. In the past, some style guides argued for leaving out the Oxford comma, but it is best to leave it in to avoid confusion.
Example: I like to read, to write, and to run.

You do not need a comma between words in a list of two items.

The second time to use a comma is when you are using a conjunction to join two independent clauses. Remember that an independent clause has both a subject and a verb and can also stand by itself. Always place the comma before the conjunction.

Example: I am exhausted, so I am taking a nap.

Note: “I am exhausted” and “I am taking a nap” are both independent clauses, so the coordinating conjunction “so” requires a comma.

This is also true if you are using correlative conjunctions to join two independent clauses.

Example: Either I will pass this exam, or I will flunk out of college.

Note: “I will pass this exam” and “I will flunk out of college” are both independent clauses, so the correlative conjunctions “either” and “or” require a comma.

You do not need a comma if you are using conjunctions to join items smaller than clauses (unless they are in a list of three or more).

Parallelism and Conjunctions

Remember that conjunctions join items of equal grammatical function. Therefore, these items should be presented in the same manner. Parallelism helps to clarify meaning and to highlight similarities or differences. Parallelism also aids the overall flow and maintains the structure of sentences.

Note: For more information on parallelism, please see our handout on this topic.

References