

Writing Centre

SENTENCE CONNECTORS & TRANSITIONS

There are four basic types of sentence connectors: coordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs. A **conjunction** or **conjunctive** adverb is a joiner; a word that connects (conjoins) parts of a sentence.

COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

Coordinating conjunctions **must always join grammatically equal (parallel) elements:** e.g., noun + noun; verb phrase + verb phrase; independent clause + independent clause.

There are seven coordinating conjunctions in English. An easy way to remember these seven conjunctions is to think of the acronym **FANBOYS**. Each of the letters in this unusual word is the first letter of one of the coordinating conjunctions. The most common are **AND, BUT** and **OR**.

FOR – means “because,” introduces a “reason” clause, and joins it to a “result” clause.

I was late, **for** I had forgotten my watch. (joins two independent clauses)

AND - joins two similar ideas together

The bowl of stew is hot **and** delicious. (joins two nouns)

I will eat it quickly **and** enjoy every bite. (joins two independent clauses)

NOR – used to combine two negative ideas. Note the reversed word order in the second clause below:

I do not eat meat, **nor** do I eat fish. (joins two independent clauses)

BUT - joins two contrasting ideas together

John is Canadian, **but** Sally is English. (joins two independent clauses)



They speak the same language **but** different dialects. (joins two noun phrases)

OR - joins two alternative ideas

I could cook some supper, **or** we could order a pizza. (joins two independent clauses)

We could eat at home **or** at a restaurant. (joins two prepositional phrases)

YET – means “but” and joins two contrasting ideas.

I was completely exhausted **yet** happy. (joins two adjectival phrases)

She knew I was injured, **yet** she insisted that I jump over the fence. (joins two indep. clauses)

SO – introduces a clause containing a result, and joins it to a clause containing a reason/cause.

It was raining, so I brought an umbrella. (joins two independent clauses)

CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS

Some coordinating conjunctions combine with other words to form what are called correlative conjunctions. They always travel in pairs, joining various sentence elements that are grammatically equal. Here is a brief list of common correlative conjunctions:

both . . . and

Both my grandfather **and** my father worked in the steel plant. (noun phrases)

not only . . . but also

The explosion **not only** destroyed the school, **but also** flattened the bank. (verb phrases)

*NOTE the word order when this correlative pair joins two clauses:



Not only *did I* fail the exam, **but I also** missed the final assignment!

not . . . but

She is not going to attend university but will attend college. (verb phrases)

either . . . or/neither . . . nor

Bring **either** a macaroni salad **or** scalloped potatoes; it's your choice. (noun phrases)

Bring **neither** a macaroni salad **nor** scalloped potatoes; no one likes them. (noun phrases)

whether . . . or

Corinne is trying to decide **whether** to go to medical school **or** to go to law school.
(verb phr.)



SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

A subordinating conjunction is a word which introduces a subordinate (dependent) clause and joins it to an independent clause. There are many, but the more commonly used ones are:

BECAUSE, AS, SINCE - used to introduce the cause in a cause/effect relationship between two ideas

ALTHOUGH, EVEN THOUGH, WHILE (meaning 'although'), WHEREAS - used to express contrast between ideas

AFTER, BEFORE, WHEN, WHILE (meaning 'during') - used to show time

IF – used to show a condition

Notice the difference in punctuation, depending on whether the subordinate clause comes first or second. If it comes first, a comma is needed. Examples:

Because/As/Since it was raining, I took my umbrella.

I lost my job **because** I was often late.

Since I have no money, I can't go to the movie.

I used to visit my grandparents frequently **when** I was a little girl.

If you love me, you'll buy me a pony.

Although/Even though she is quite small, she's very strong.

She's very strong **even though** she's quite small.

John is tall, **whereas** Mary is quite small.*



***Note** that “whereas” is used differently from “although.” It is less flexible, and can only be used to contrast two complete facts rather than two aspects of the same item/person/subject. We **cannot** say, “She’s very strong, whereas she’s quite small.”

***Note** that “whereas” and “while” are **always** preceded by a comma, even if they are in the second clause. (My minor is in East Asian Studies, **while** Bob’s minor was Art History.)

CONJUNCTIVE ADVERBS/TRANSITIONS

These words and phrases are extremely flexible and powerful because they not only connect ideas within a sentence but also create transitions between major ideas and sections within a piece of writing. Additionally, they can occupy several different positions in a sentence and can introduce an independent clause as a stand-alone sentence.

There are many conjunctive adverbs in English; however, some of the most common are:

ADDITIONALLY, MOREOVER – connects two similar ideas

HOWEVER, NEVERTHELESS, IN CONTRAST – connects two contrasting ideas

THEREFORE, CONSEQUENTLY, THUS – connects a result to a preceding cause

FOR EXAMPLE, FOR INSTANCE – connects an example/illustration to a preceding statement

FIRST, NEXT, THEN, FINALLY – shows a sequential relationship between ideas

Use, position and punctuation:

When connecting two independent clauses within a single sentence, use a semi-colon and comma:

I love learning about grammar; **however**, I don’t understand all of it.

When connecting ideas in separate sentences, use a period before the adverb and a comma after it:



I love learning about grammar. **Nevertheless**, I don't understand all of it.

(Note: 'Thus' and 'Then' are exceptions and are not followed by commas in these cases.)

The adverb can occupy different positions in the second clause/sentence, depending on what we want to emphasise. When surrounded by other sentence parts, commas are used to set the adverb apart:

I love learning about grammar. I don't, **however**, understand all of it. (emphasises contrast between positive feeling and negative ability)

I love learning about grammar. I don't understand all of it, **however**. (emphasises contrast between learning and understanding or emphasises lack of *complete* understanding)

I love learning about grammar. He, **however**, hates it. (emphasises difference between he & I)

See the "Transition Words & Phrases" handout for a great list of transitions by their logical function!

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