

Grammar Conjunctions

Conjunctions connect elements of a sentence or text and show how they relate to each other. Correctly using conjunctions helps writers avoid common grammatical errors like run-on sentences, sentence fragments, and comma splices.

COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

There are six **coordinating conjunctions**: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so* (F.A.N.B.O.Y.S.). They are used to join independent clauses or grammatically equivalent elements (for example, multiple nouns, multiple prepositional phrases, or multiple verb phrases) within a sentence.

ITEMS IN A LIST

◀ **Lists with three or more items:** If a list has more than two elements, each is separated from the next by a comma. A coordinating conjunction is used between the final two items, and a comma before the conjunction is optional (depending on the purpose and discipline for which the paper is written).

EXAMPLE: Erin slept, studied, **and** ate. (The coordinating conjunction, *and*, connects the last two past tense verbs in a list of three—*slept, studied, ate*.)

EXAMPLE: I don't know whether Lewis went to work, to the hospital, to school, **or** to the store. (The coordinating conjunction, *or*, connects the last two prepositional phrases in a list of four—*to work, to the hospital, to school, to the store*.)

◀ **Lists with two items:** A comma should not be used before a coordinating conjunction that connects only two elements in a list.

EXAMPLE: Tanya went to France **and** Belgium. (The coordinating conjunction, *and*, connects two nouns—*France* and *Belgium*.)

DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT CLAUSES

Conjunctions can be used to connect both **dependent** and **independent** clauses.

◀ **Dependent Clauses:** A dependent clause contains a subject and a verb, but by itself it is not a complete thought. A list of dependent clauses is treated like any other list of equivalent elements. (See "Items in a List" above.)

◀ **Independent Clauses:** An independent clause contains a subject and a verb and is complete standing by itself. When connecting two independent clauses, a coordinating conjunction is preceded by a comma. Failure to include the comma creates a **run-on sentence**.

INCORRECT: Tanya went to France **but** Erin stayed home. (run-on sentence)

CORRECT: Tanya went to France, **but** Erin stayed home.

◀ **Caution:** When a coordinating conjunction joins two elements that are *not* independent clauses, it should not be accompanied by a comma.

INCORRECT: Tanya **flew from Utah to Ohio, and then drove back**. (The second phrase—*then drove back*—does not have a subject, so it is not an independent clause. Thus, the coordinating conjunction actually connects two verb phrases—*flew from Utah to Ohio* and *then drove back*—and the comma before the conjunction should be omitted.)

CORRECT: Tanya **flew from Utah to Ohio and then drove back**.

CORRECT: **Tanya flew from Utah to Ohio, and then she drove back**. (With the addition of a subject [*she*] to the second phrase, the phrase becomes an independent clause. Now the conjunction connects two independent clauses and needs a comma before it.)

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CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS

Like coordinating conjunctions, **correlative conjunctions** connect grammatically equivalent parts of a sentence and show how they are related, but unlike coordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions always work in pairs: *neither . . . nor*; *either . . . or*; *not only . . . but also*; *whether . . . or*.

EXAMPLE: **Neither** Tanya **nor** Erin went to Africa. (The conjunction, *neither . . . nor*, connects the nouns, *Tanya* and *Erin*.)

Tanya **not only** flew to South America, **but** she **also** sailed to Antarctica. (The conjunction, *not only . . . but also*, connects the two clauses—*Tanya flew to South America* and *she sailed to Antarctica*.)

SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

A **subordinating conjunction** placed at the beginning of an independent clause changes it into a **subordinate** or **dependent clause** (no longer a complete sentence). It introduces the dependent clause and shows how it relates to the independent clause to which it is joined. There are many subordinating conjunctions. Some of the most common are *after*, *although*, *because*, *before*, *if*, *since*, *though*, *that*, *until*, *when*, *where*, *whether*, *which*, *while*, *who*, and *why*. (NOTE: Failure to join a subordinate clause to an independent clause is one of the easiest ways to create a **sentence fragment**.)

CORRECT: Tanya travels a lot. Erin does not. (Two complete sentences with no conjunctions.)

INCORRECT: **Although** Tanya travels a lot. Erin does not. (The subordinating conjunction, *Although*, has made the first clause into a dependent clause. By itself, it is a sentence fragment.)

CORRECT: **Although** Tanya travels a lot, Erin does not. (The dependent clause, *Although Tanya travels a lot*, is attached to the independent clause, *Erin does not*, by a comma.)

CONJUNCTIVE ADVERBS

A **conjunctive adverb** is often used as a transition. It is placed at the beginning of one sentence (independent clause) to show how it relates to the previous sentence. Some common conjunctive adverbs are *also*, *consequently*, *finally*, *furthermore*, *however*, *meanwhile*, *nevertheless*, *next*, *still*, *therefore*, and *thus*.

Unlike subordinating conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs do not make clauses dependent. Consequently, clauses that begin with conjunctive adverbs must be treated as independent clauses. They may not be joined to other sentences by a comma alone; doing so creates a **comma splice**. (If a conjunctive adverb introduces a sentence that is closely related to the previous one, the two sentences may be connected by a semicolon instead of a period.)

INCORRECT: Erin hates to travel, **consequently**, she stays home. (comma splice)

CORRECT: Erin hates to travel; **consequently**, she stays home. (Two independent clauses may be joined by a semicolon to show that they are closely related.)

CORRECT: Erin hates to travel. **Consequently**, she stays home. (Two independent clauses may be separated by a period.)