

COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

Coordinating Conjunctions

There are many grammar terms which contain the word conjunction! It can be a challenge to remember what the different types are, and how to use them correctly. Coordinating conjunctions are most commonly mixed up with subordinating conjunctions, which you can learn more about in our post on subordinating conjunctions. Let's review and practice the rules for using coordinating conjunctions, and you'll have them mastered in no time!

In this post we'll review what coordinating conjunctions are, the patterns for different ways to use them, and how to use them effectively in a sentence.

Once you're feeling confident, test yourself with a post-assessment quiz and practice with our high quality, standards-aligned questions here.

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The Basics of Coordinating Conjunctions

What is a Coordinating Conjunction?

Coordinating Conjunctions are words used to connect words, phrases, and independent clauses. We use coordinating conjunctions when we want to put equal emphasis on the words, phrases, or independent clauses that we are connecting.

The words you'll never forget!

Coordinating conjunctions are limited to a few words that can easily be remembered with a simple acronym: FANBOYS

For And Nor But Or Yet So

These are the seven words that are used as coordinating conjunctions, and they can easily be memorized. Keep in mind that some of these words might be used in other ways, but they are also the only words used as coordinating conjunctions.

Now, let's go over the uses of these words, and the comma rules that go with them.

Connecting Two Words

Coordinating conjunctions can connect two words that serve the same purpose in a sentence (two verbs, two nouns, two adjectives, etc...). For this usage, we use the following structure:

Word Coordinating Conjunction Word

Commas are not needed when only two words are being connected.

For lunch I could have a cheeseburger or pizza.

The weather is cool yet pleasant.

The children hopped and skipped to the park.

Connecting Two Phrases

Coordinating Conjunctions can connect two grammatically equal phrases. For this usage, we use the same structure used for connecting two words.

He was nervous for the audition but excited for the possibilities.

We can drive to the pool or walk to the park.

They were sweet little puppies and playful with kids.

Connecting Two Independent Clauses

When we connect two main clauses with a coordinating conjunction, we use the following structure:

Independent Clause , (Comma) Coordinating Conjunction Independent Clause

The kids got bored, so they went to the park.

Most video games are fun, but Minecraft is the best one!

The guests did not mind the delay, nor did they complain about getting a different room.

Pro Tip: Using coordinating conjunctions to combine independent clauses improves our writing by taking short, choppy sentences, and making them more complex. Compare the following two examples:

I wanted to bake a cake. I went to the store. I bought flour and sugar. I bought chocolate frosting to go on top. I also got fresh strawberries to put on the cake.

I wanted to bake a cake, so I went to the store and bought flour and sugar. I also bought chocolate frosting and fresh strawberries to go on top of the cake.

The second example flows better and sounds more sophisticated.

Connecting Items in a Series

Connecting items in a series - Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions are also used to connect more than two words, phrases, or clauses. When connecting more than two items, we separate the individual items with a comma and place the coordinating conjunction before the last item.

*The rules concerning the use of a comma before the final item in the series (often referred to as the Oxford Comma) are determined by the style guide you are using. Most style guides recommend the use of the Oxford Comma; however, it is often not used in AP® style writing.

Here are examples of coordinating conjunctions being used to connect items in a series for words, phrases, and clauses:

Words in a series: I went to the store and bought fruit, bread, and water.

Phrases in a series: Today, I went to the store, studied for an exam, but forgot to cook dinner.

Clauses in a series: To get ready for the party, Johnny picked up snacks, Joey bought decorations, and Jessie cleaned the house.

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Tips for Recognizing and Using Coordinating Conjunctions

Tip #1: Yes, you CAN start a sentence with a coordinating conjunction. And it's not breaking the rules!

Most of us are taught to never start a sentence with a conjunction. This is because young writers have a

greater habit of writing sentence fragments when starting a sentence with a conjunction.

As long as you are writing complete sentences, starting with a conjunction is fine. But you want to make sure you don't overuse this method, and you still want to avoid sentence fragments.

Let's look at an example of the right and wrong way to use a coordinating conjunction at the start of a sentence:

Incorrect Example

I studied hard for days to make sure I would do well on my first exam. But forgot everything I had studied the moment I started the exam.

The above example is an incorrect way of starting a sentence with a coordinating conjunction. Can you see the problem? The second sentence, which starts with the coordinating conjunction 'but', is a sentence fragment. There is no subject in the sentence. So let's see how to do this right way:

Correct Example

I studied hard for days to make sure I would do well on my first exam. But I forgot everything I had studied the moment I started the exam.

By adding the subject “I” before the verb, we now have a complete sentence, and using the coordinating conjunction is perfectly fine.

Keep in mind, even though it’s grammatically correct, starting a sentence with a coordinating conjunction is seen as a less formal way of writing. Always know your audience when writing. If you are writing for a more formal audience, you should probably avoid using a coordinating conjunction at the start of a sentence.

Tip #2: Make sure you know the difference between an independent clause and a dependent (subordinate) clause.

Tips for Recognizing and Using Coordinating Conjunctions

To use coordinating conjunctions, you need to have a solid understanding of what an independent clause is.

Independent clauses are, in short, clauses that can stand alone as complete sentences. They contain a subject and a verb and express a complete thought.

Let's look again at the examples used for combining two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction:

The kids got bored, so they went to the park.

Most video games are fun, but Minecraft is the best one!

The guests did not mind the delay, nor did they complain about getting a different room.

We know we are using independent clauses if we can take the coordinating conjunction out and write the example as two sentences:

The kids got bored. They went to the park.

Most video games are fun. Minecraft is the best one!

The guests did not mind the delay. They did not complain about getting a different room.

Note: The coordinating conjunction 'nor' relies on the first independent clause having a 'negative'. In this case, the first independent clause says 'did not mind',

which is a negative. The second clause is still an independent clause, but when written without the coordinating conjunction 'nor', the clause needs to be adjusted slightly to account for the negative.

You can learn more about independent and dependent clauses in our posts covering these topics.

Tip #3: Coordinating conjunctions do not serve the same purpose as conjunctive adverbs.

Both coordinating conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs serve a similar purpose; they combine two independent clauses. However, while coordinating conjunctions put equal emphasis on both clauses, conjunctive adverbs provide a transition from one complete idea to another, showing a progression of ideas.

Let's look at an example to better understand the difference between coordinating conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs:

Sally finished her science homework, and she started her math homework.

In this sentence, the independent clauses, “Sally finished her science homework” is being combined with the independent clause, “She started her math homework” with the coordinating conjunction, “and”. Both clauses have equal weight in the sentence. Let’s see what happens when we use a conjunctive adverb instead.

Sally finished her science homework; therefore, she started her math homework.

When we switch to a conjunctive adverb, the punctuation changes, and the second clause takes on a different implied meaning. Now, the sentence suggests that “she started her math homework” as a result of or in consequence of finishing her science homework.

Some of our coordinating conjunctions can be used as conjunctive adverbs if they are being used to show a transition/progression of ideas and appropriately punctuated.

Learn more about conjunctive adverbs in our post on adjectives and adverbs.

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Applying the Basics: Coordinating Conjunctions Review & Practice

Now that you understand what coordinating conjunctions are, and how to use them properly in a sentence, let's practice identifying them and checking for proper usage. Remember, coordinating conjunctions are words used to connect words, phrases, and independent clauses.

Coordinating Conjunctions Exercises & Review

Complete the quick exercise below to assess your mastery of coordinating conjunctions.

Identify the best coordinating conjunction for each sentence.

1. We ran to the end of the street, _____ we missed the bus.

but or yet

2. We will go on vacation this spring, _____ we will wait until the summer.

or

3. They had to run _____ swim to prepare for the competition.

and

4. The students enjoyed the time off _____ wanted to see their friends.

yet or but

5. She must have been tired, _____ she fell asleep almost instantly.

for

For additional practice, check out the Coordinating Conjunctions content on Albert.

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Try for Yourself: Coordinating Conjunctions Quiz

Feeling confident in your understanding of coordinating conjunctions?

Take this short quiz to see what you've learned:

Start the quiz

1. Do coordinating conjunctions require a comma when combining two phrases?

Answer: No

Correct Explanation: That's right! Coordinating conjunctions can combine words, phrases, and independent clauses. Commas are only required when combining independent clauses or more than two words, phrases, or clauses.

Incorrect Explanation: Sorry, that's not right. Remember, coordinating conjunctions can combine words, phrases, and independent clauses. Commas are

only required when combining independent clauses or more than two words, phrases, or clauses.

2. Are coordinating conjunctions interchangeable with conjunctive adjectives?

Answer: No

Correct Explanation: That's right! Coordinating conjunctions combine words, phrases, and independent clauses and put equal emphasis on what is being combined. Conjunctive adverbs are only used when combining independent clauses to show a transition or progression between ideas.

Incorrect Explanation: Sorry, that's not right.

Remember, conjunctive adverbs are only used when combining independent clauses to show a transition or progression between ideas. Coordinating conjunctions combine words, phrases, and independent clauses and put equal emphasis on what is being combined.

3. Which of the following acronyms helps us remember the seven coordinating conjunctions?

A. FLYBOYS

B. FANBOYS

Answer: A

Correct Explanation: That's right! The seven coordinating conjunctions are: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, and So. FANBOYS is a great acronym for remembering these seven words.

Incorrect Explanation: Sorry, that's not right. Remember, the seven coordinating conjunctions are: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, and So. So FANBOYS is the correct acronym for the seven coordinating conjunctions.

4. Which of the following sentences accurately uses a coordinating conjunction?

A. The house was painted red, and yellow before new windows were put in.

B. The house was painted red and yellow before new windows were put in.

Answer: B

Correct Explanation: That's right! When combining two words with a coordinating conjunction, no comma is needed. Commas are added if more than two words are being combined.

Incorrect Explanation: Sorry, that's not right.

Remember, commas are only needed when combining more than two words with a coordinating conjunction. When combining two words with a coordinating conjunction, no comma is needed.

5. Which of the following sentences accurately uses a coordinating conjunction?

A. The kids jumped on the bed, and ran up and down the stairs to get their energy out.

B. The kids jumped on the bed and ran up and down the stairs to get their energy out.

Answer: B

Correct Explanation: That's right! When combining two phrases with a coordinating conjunction, no comma is needed. Commas are added if more than two phrases are being combined.

Incorrect Explanation: Sorry, that's not right.

Remember, commas are only needed when combining more than two phrases with a coordinating conjunction. When combining two phrases with a coordinating conjunction, no comma is needed.

6. Which of the following sentences accurately uses a coordinating conjunction?

A. I love the theater; accordingly, I went to see Les Misérables and Hamilton when they came to town.

B. I love the theater so I went to see Les Misérables, and Hamilton when they came to town.

Answer: A

Correct Explanation: That's right! This one is a little tricky. The coordinating conjunction in the first sentence is the word 'and' between the two show titles. When combining two words with a coordinating conjunction, no comma is needed. This sentence also includes the conjunctive adverb 'accordingly' to transition from the first independent clause.

Incorrect Explanation: Sorry, that's not right. Remember, when combining two words with a coordinating conjunction, no comma is needed. The show titles should not include a comma before the coordinating conjunction 'and'. Additionally, a comma IS required when combining two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction. There should be a comma after the word theater. This differs from sentence 'a', because sentence 'a' uses a conjunctive adverb after the word 'theater', which requires a semicolon before accordingly and a comma after.

For additional practice with comparative and superlative adjectives, check out our completely free practice on Albert.io: Coordinating Conjunctions.

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Teacher's Corner for Coordinating Conjunctions

While it's true that coordinating conjunctions are a foundational grammar skill, the Common Core English Language Progressive Skills Chart shows that even elementary-level skills "require continued attention in

higher grades as they are applied to increasingly sophisticated writing and speaking.”

For specific standards addressing coordinating conjunctions, check out the Common Core State Standards site!

Albert’s grammar course is 100% free, and the Coordinating Conjunctions practices can be used for much more than homework!

Our assessments can be used as pre-and post-tests to measure student progress. Our pre-made quizzes can be used as bell-ringers, exit tickets, and more!

In addition to our pre-made assessments, you can also use our assignments feature to create your own quizzes and assessments.

Summary on Coordinate Conjunctions

Coordinating Conjunctions are words used to connect words, phrases, and independent clauses and give equal emphasis to what is being combined.

The acronym FANBOYS is a great way of remembering the seven coordinating conjunctions: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, and So.

Using coordinating conjunctions is a great way to improve our writing because it allows for more fluid compound sentences and less short, choppy sentences.

Practice makes perfect! Use our Coordinating Conjunctions practice on Albert's completely free grammar course!