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# Conjunctions

Conjunctions are words that join words, phrases or clauses. There are three types: coordinating conjunctions such as and, but and so; subordinating conjunctions such as although, because and if; and correlative pairs such as both ... and and either ... or. Each type follows its own rules for word order and punctuation.

## What to know

### Coordinating conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions join two parts of equal importance. The seven most common are for, and, nor, but, or, yet and so. Many teachers remember them as fanboys.

- *I wanted to study medicine, but I did not pass the entrance test. · She was tired, so she went home early.*
- *You can pay online or at the desk. · He neither called nor wrote.*

### Subordinating conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions begin a dependent clause, which cannot stand alone. They show reason (because, since, as), contrast (although, even though, while, whereas), time (when, after, before, until), and condition (if, unless, as long as).

### Correlative conjunctions

Correlative conjunctions work in pairs. The common ones are both ... and, either ... or, neither ... nor, not only ... but also, and whether ... or. The two parts must have the same grammatical form, which is called parallel structure.

### Conjunctions and linking adverbs

Words like however, therefore, moreover and consequently look like conjunctions, but they are not. They are linking adverbs, and they do not join two clauses on their own. If you put one between two clauses with only a comma, you create a comma splice: The prices rose, however, people still bought the product is wrong.

### Mistakes to avoid

The most common mistakes are doubling conjunctions (Although ... but, Because ... so), joining two clauses with only a comma, and starting too many sentences with and or but in formal writing. Short sentences that begin with But are acceptable in speech, and they appear in some published writing, but they can look informal in an essay.

## Exercises

1. I wanted to study medicine, \_\_\_\_\_ I did not pass the entrance test.
  - a. so
  - b. but
  - c. because

2. \_\_\_\_\_ the weather was bad, the flight left on time.
- Although
  - But
  - So
3. Either you submit the form today \_\_\_\_\_ you lose your place.
- and
  - or
  - nor
4. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) Because the road was closed, (2) so we (3) took the train.
5. Begin with She. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): but also / and / not only / clever / hard-working. / She is
6. Correct this by taking out one word: *Although he was tired, but he kept studying.*
7. Neither the manager \_\_\_\_\_ the staff knew about the change.
- nor
  - and
  - or
8. I stayed at home \_\_\_\_\_ I felt ill.
- so
  - because
  - despite
9. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) The prices rose, (2) however, (3) people still (4) bought the product.
10. Both the teachers \_\_\_\_\_ the students were happy with the new timetable.
- and
  - or
  - nor

**Practise online, free:** hear every example and check your answers at [www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/conjunctions/practice/](http://www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/conjunctions/practice/)

**IELTS tip.** In Writing Task 2, check each long sentence for one conjunction doing one job, and avoid pairs like although ... but and because ... so. In Speaking, use because and although to extend an answer with a reason or a contrast.

**FOR TEACHERS · GRAMMAR**

# Conjunctions

|                  |                                                                                                                               |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>AIM</b>       | Learners identify the three types of conjunction, punctuate them correctly, and avoid doubled conjunctions and comma splices. |
| <b>TIME</b>      | 30 minutes                                                                                                                    |
| <b>LEVEL</b>     | B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)                                                                                                     |
| <b>MATERIALS</b> | This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio                                                  |

## Warm-up

Write two short sentences on the board and ask learners to join them in three different ways. Sort the answers by type of conjunction.

## Lesson steps

1. Present the three types with one example each, and ask learners to find the conjunction in a short text.
2. Drill the punctuation rule with a gap-fill of eight sentences that have clauses in both orders.
3. Introduce correlative pairs and parallel structure with a matching activity.
4. Show five faulty sentences (doubled conjunctions, comma splices, despite plus a clause) and have learners fix them.

## Extension

Learners write a six-sentence paragraph on a Task 2 topic using at least one conjunction of each type.

## Answer key

1. b) but. But joins two contrasting clauses after a comma. So would show a result and because would show a reason, and neither fits this meaning.
2. a) Although. Although begins the dependent clause. But and so are coordinating conjunctions and cannot start the sentence.
3. b) or. Either is paired with or.
4. Part 2: *so we* → **we**. Because already links the reason to the result, so so is not needed.
5. She is not only clever but also hard-working. Not only is paired with but also, and the two adjectives match.
6. Although he was tired, he kept studying. Use although or but, not both.
7. a) nor. Neither is paired with nor.
8. b) because. Because introduces a reason and is followed by a full clause. Despite needs a noun.

9. Part 2: *however*, → **but**. However is not a conjunction, so a comma alone cannot join the two clauses. But is a conjunction and can. Therefore and moreover are linking adverbs with the same problem.
10. a) and. Both is paired with and.

## Questions learners often ask

**What are the three types of conjunctions?** They are coordinating (and, but, so), subordinating (although, because, if) and correlative (both ... and, either ... or).

**Can I start a sentence with and or but?** It is common in speech and acceptable in some writing, but in IELTS Writing it is safer to use a linking adverb or to join the sentences.

**Is however a conjunction?** No. However is a linking adverb. Use a full stop or semicolon before it, not a comma.

**Do I need a comma before and?** Use a comma before and when it joins two full clauses. Do not use one when it joins two words, two phrases or two verbs with the same subject.

## Sources

- Swan, M. (2016). Practical English Usage (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. (2006). Cambridge Grammar of English. Cambridge University Press.

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