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CONJUNCTIONS IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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Janobiddinov Inomjon
Namangan Region, Namangan District
№1 Polytechnic

Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of conjunctions in modern English, with a focus on their role in complex sentence construction. The study examines various types of conjunctions, including coordinating, subordinating, and correlative conjunctions, and explores their semantic and syntactic functions. Based on the analysis of authentic examples from written and spoken sources, the article identifies key patterns of conjunction usage and highlights their importance for creating coherent and meaningful discourse. The findings of this study can be valuable for English language teachers, linguistics students, and anyone interested in English grammar.

Keywords

Conjunctions, English grammar, syntax, complex sentences, coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions, discourse markers, cohesion, coherence.

A conjunction is a word that links other words, phrases, or clauses together. There are three main types of conjunctions: coordinating, correlative, and subordinating.

Here, we'll discuss the different types of conjunctions and demonstrate with examples how to use them correctly.

- Conjunctions are words that join phrases, clauses, or words within a sentence, helping us to communicate interconnected and complex things coherently.
- There are three main types of conjunctions: coordinating, correlative, and subordinating.
- Coordinating conjunctions, often represented by the acronym FANBOYS (*for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*), connect words, phrases, or independent clauses of equal grammatical importance in a sentence.

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• Correlative conjunctions operate in pairs—such as *either/or* and *neither/nor*—framing grammatically equivalent elements in order to connect clauses that together form a complete thought.

• Subordinating conjunctions, including *although*, *because*, *that*, and *while*, connect a dependent clause to the independent clause of a sentence, indicating a specific logical relationship between the two.

How do conjunctions work?

Conjunctions create connections that identify the logical relationships between ideas or sentence elements. These relationships may be used to indicate an addition (as with and), create contrast (but, yet, although), establish cause and effect (because), or introduce a condition (unless), among other things.

Why conjunctions matter in writing

Conjunctions allow you to put together cohesive ideas and incorporate variety in your sentence structures so that you can balance longer, more involved sentences with concise ones. Knowing how to use conjunctions properly enhances the clarity of your writing as well as its overall rhythm and tone.

Without conjunctions, you'd be forced to express every complex idea in a series of short, simplistic sentences: I like cooking. I like eating. I don't like washing dishes afterward.

With conjunctions, sentences can be more fluid and sophisticated, and the logical connections between them can be clearly expressed: I like cooking and eating, but I don't like washing dishes afterward.

Here are some further examples, which present the same ideas, first without conjunctions and then with them:

Without conjunctions: I am a member of that gym. I can reserve a spot at fitness classes ahead of time. If I were not a member, I would have to arrive early to be sure I could attend. I would have to wait in line for the door to open to be sure I could attend.

With conjunctions: Because I am a member of that gym, I can reserve a spot at fitness classes ahead of time, but otherwise I would have to both arrive early and wait in line for the door to open in order to be sure I could attend.

Not only is the example without conjunctions distractingly choppy, the logical relationships between its elements are unclear.

Coordinating conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions allow you to join words, phrases, and clauses of equal grammatical rank in a sentence. The most common coordinating conjunctions are *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*; you can remember them with the acronym FANBOYS.

In the following sentence, the coordinating conjunction *or* is connecting two nouns: *pizza* and *salad*:

I'd like pizza or a salad for lunch.

When the elements that a coordinating conjunction joins are two independent clauses, a comma is used before the conjunction:

She enjoys painting, and he loves playing the guitar.

It's important to make sure that the words or phrases joined by coordinating conjunctions are parallel (have the same structure):

I work quickly and careful.

I work quickly and carefully.

It's also important not to make the common error of creating a run-on sentence, which is a compound sentence in which two independent clauses are incorrectly separated by just a comma:

Incorrect: I work quickly, I check my work carefully.

Run-on sentences can be corrected by either adding a coordinating conjunction or changing the comma to a semicolon or period:

I work quickly, but I check my work carefully.

I work quickly; I check my work carefully.

I work quickly. I check my work carefully.

Examples of coordinating conjunctions in sentences

Here are some more examples of coordinating conjunctions in sentences:

They'd never traveled to the coast, for the journey was long and difficult.

Please buy apples and peaches at the market.

The child doesn't want to get up, nor does she have an appetite.

Jesse didn't have much money, but they got by.

I haven't seen Malik or Noemi in the longest time.

Sophie is clearly exhausted, yet she insists on dancing till dawn.

Correlative conjunctions

Correlative conjunctions are pairs of conjunctions that work together by framing and connecting grammatically identical sentence elements. Some common examples are *both/and*, *either/or*, *neither/nor*, and *not only / but also*.

It's important to pair correlative conjunctions correctly; avoid common errors like *I take both pilates as well as swimming at the YMCA* (it should be *I take both pilates and swimming at the YMCA*).

Examples of correlative conjunctions in sentences

I am finished with both my English essay and my history essay.

The cats' food needs to move either out of the kitchen or onto a higher surface that the dog can't reach.

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Neither Shel's mother nor her father has ever been to visit her in Amsterdam.

Not only am I finished studying for English, but I'm also finished writing my history essay.

Subordinating conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions join dependent clauses to the independent clauses of sentences, signaling cause and effect, comparison, contrast, time, or some other kind of relationship between the clauses. Common subordinating conjunctions include *because*, *since*, *as*, *although*, *though*, *until*, *while*, and *whereas*. They introduce a dependent clause that depends on the sentence's independent clause to make sense:

I can stay out until the clock strikes twelve.

Here, the presence of the subordinating conjunction *until* makes *until the clock strikes twelve* a dependent clause; it is dependent on the independent clause (*I can stay out*) for its meaning, and it in turn provides clarifying information about the independent clause.

A subordinating conjunction doesn't need to go between the two clauses the way it does in the above examples. It must introduce the dependent clause, but the dependent clause can come before the independent clause.

Before he leaves, make sure his room is clean.

If the dependent clause comes first, use a comma before the independent clause.

I drank a glass of water because I was thirsty.

Because I was thirsty, I drank a glass of water.

***That* as a subordinating conjunction**

The word *that*, which is usually a demonstrative pronoun or a relative pronoun, sometimes acts as a subordinating conjunction by introducing a dependent clause after certain kinds of verbs, adjectives, and nouns in a sentence's independent clause.

That clauses with verbs

Dependent clauses beginning with *that* often follow verbs that express acts of statement (such as *say*, *report*, *indicate*, and so on) or acts of thought (*think*, *know*, *believe*, *hope*, *imagine*, and so on):

The professor said that we would all get our grades over break.

I imagine that she and I will talk this over when we see each other next.

That clauses with adjectives

Another kind of dependent clause introduced by *that* often follows an independent clause with a form of *to be* and an adjective having to do with a feeling or opinion. These adjectives include *sure*, *certain*, *excited*, *sorry*, and others:

He was certain that he had locked the door when he left.

I am excited that we are taking the martial arts class together.

That clauses with nouns

Independent clauses with certain nouns that name opinions, feelings, or statements used as direct objects, indirect objects, or objects of prepositions are also often followed by dependent clauses beginning with *that*. Such nouns include *belief*, *fact*, *hope*, *idea*, and *possibility*:

I am holding on to the hope that the art center will raise the funds to stay open.

She shared the possibility that the café would start staying open later on weekends.

Omitting *that*

That as a subordinating conjunction in any of the above circumstances can be omitted if the meaning remains clear:

I imagine she and I will talk this over when we see each other next.

He was certain he had locked the door when he left.

Examples of subordinating conjunctions in sentences

They continued to drive slowly although it had stopped raining.

She often goes to the cinema alone since she doesn't enjoy talking after movies.

Whereas we usually go out for New Year's Eve, this year we decided to celebrate at home.

He doesn't like to travel by bus unless it's for a very short distance.

Conjunctive adverbs

A conjunctive adverb is an adverb that does the job of a conjunction: It connects two clauses or ideas by modifying one of them. Functionally, it can link two independent clauses in one sentence using a semicolon between the clauses and, usually, a comma after the conjunctive adverb. It can also link the ideas in two sentences or link ideas within an independent clause.

Conjunctive adverbs often express ideas of addition (*also*, *besides*, *furthermore*), cause and effect (*accordingly*, *consequently*, *therefore*), clarification (*namely*, *that is*), comparison (*likewise*, *similarly*), contrast (*however*, *regardless*, *still*), emphasis (*certainly*, *indeed*), or time (*meanwhile*, *recently*, *beforehand*).

Examples of conjunctive adverbs in sentences

I have lived in this town since I was seven; also, I still live in the house I grew up in.

She is an avid gardener. That is, she grows much of the food for her household.

He believed in responsible consumption and lived accordingly.

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Raven works a lot of hours at their day job; nevertheless, they always find time for their artwork.

Starting a sentence with a conjunction

Many of us were taught in school that it's a mistake to begin a sentence with a conjunction, but that rule is a myth. As mentioned above, a subordinating conjunction can begin a sentence if the dependent clause comes before the independent clause.

It's also correct to begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction. Often, it's a good way to add emphasis. Beginning too many sentences with conjunctions will cause the device to lose its force, however, so use this technique sparingly.

Have a safe trip. And don't forget to call when you get home.

Gertie flung open the door. But there was no one on the other side.

List of common conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs

Here's a table showing common coordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs.

List of common conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs

Coordinating conjunctions	Correlative conjunctions	Subordinating conjunctions	Conjunctive adverbs
FANBOYS: • for • and • nor • but • or • yet • so	• either/or • neither/nor • not only/but also • both/and • whether/or	• because • although • since • if • unless • while • before • after • though • as • whereas • when • until • that	• however • therefore • moreover • consequently • furthermore • nevertheless • meanwhile • thus

Conjunctions are often small words, but they do a big job, allowing you to make smooth and elegant logical connections while varying the lengths and structures of your sentences. Mastering the different types of conjunctions and how to use them correctly will advance the sophistication and clarity of your writing immeasurably.

Conjunctions FAQs

What are the three main types of conjunctions?

Coordinating conjunctions allow you to join words, phrases, and clauses of equal grammatical rank in a sentence. The most common coordinating conjunctions are *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*.

Correlative conjunctions are pairs of conjunctions that work together. Some examples are *both/and*, *either/or*, and *neither/nor*.

Subordinating conjunctions signal cause and effect, a contrast, or some other kind of relationship between the clauses. Common subordinating conjunctions are *because*, *since*, *as*, and *although*.

Can you start a sentence with a conjunction?

Starting a sentence with a coordinating conjunction like *and*, *but*, or *so* is grammatically acceptable, especially in conversational or informal writing. However, be mindful of not starting too many sentences with coordinating conjunctions, as this can make the writing feel repetitive.

What is the difference between a conjunction and a conjunctive adverb?

A conjunctive adverb is similar to a coordinating conjunction in that it links sentences, independent clauses, or other grammatically equal elements. It is different in that it does this while still functioning as an adverb, turning the clause that it introduces into an adverbial modifier of the previous clause.

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