

Conjunctions

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Conjunctions connect elements of a sentence or text and show how they relate to each other.

Coordinating Conjunctions

There are seven coordinating conjunctions: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so* (F.A.N.B.O.Y.S.). They are generally not followed by any punctuation.

for	and	nor	but	or	yet	so
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Coordinating conjunctions are used to join independent clauses or elements like multiple nouns or phrases within a sentence.

Dependent and Independent Clauses

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

- A **dependent clause** contains a subject and a verb, but by itself it is not a complete thought. On their own, dependent clauses cannot be punctuated with periods.

EXAMPLE: “While **I was** in Reno” has a subject and verb, but the thought is not complete.

- An **independent clause** contains a subject and a verb and is a complete thought. Independent clauses can be punctuated with periods and semicolons.

EXAMPLE: “**I was** in Reno” has a subject and verb, and the thought is complete.

When connecting **two independent clauses**, a coordinating conjunction is preceded by a comma.

INCORRECT: Tanya went to France but Erin stayed home.

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

When connecting **two elements that are not independent clauses**, a coordinating conjunction with no comma is used.

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.

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.

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).

EXAMPLES: Erin slept, studied, **and** ate.

I don't know whether Lewis went to work, to the hospital, to school, **or** 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.

EXAMPLES: Tanya went to France **and** Belgium.

Erin did her laundry **and** listened to music.

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Correlative Conjunctions

Correlative conjunctions work in pairs to show how parts of a sentence are related. They follow the same comma rules as dependent and independent clauses.

neither . . . nor	not only . . . but also	whether . . . or	either . . . or
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EXAMPLES: **Neither** Tanya **nor** Erin went to Africa.
 Tanya **not only** flew to South America, **but** she **also** sailed to Antarctica.

Subordinating Conjunctions

A subordinating conjunction placed at the beginning of an independent clause changes it into a dependent clause (no longer a complete sentence). Subordinating conjunctions show how clauses relate to each other.

after	although	because	if	since	though	that	when
where	whether	which	while	who	why	before	until

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 sentence into 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 and placed at the beginning of one independent clause to show how it relates to the previous statement. It is almost always followed by a comma.

also	consequently	finally	furthermore	however	meanwhile
nevertheless	next	still	therefore	thus	then

Unlike subordinating conjunctions, however, conjunctive adverbs do not make clauses dependent. Therefore, clauses that begin with conjunctive adverbs must be treated as independent clauses. They may not be joined to other sentences by a comma; use a period or a semicolon instead.

INCORRECT: Erin hates to travel, **consequently, she stays home.**
Two independent clauses (*Erin hates to travel* and *consequently, she stays home*) joined by a comma create a 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.