ELL/ESL: Conjunctions

Conjunctions fuse together words and sentences. Three main kinds of conjunctions exist in English: coordinating, correlative, and subordinating conjunctions. Each has a slightly different meaning and using them correctly will open up different kinds of sentences for you. This resource will teach you the proper grammar for conjunctions.

**KINDS OF CONJUNCTIONS**

1. **Coordinating Conjunctions** – Coordinating conjunctions are the simplest kind of conjunctions. They join together words, phrases, and independent clauses.
   
   a. There are seven coordinating conjunctions in English. These are often remembered using the acronym Fanboys: For And Nor But Or Yet So
   
   b. When using them to combine two complete sentences (independent clauses), put a comma before the conjunction.
      
      i. *Example:* I would love to go to the water park today, but it is raining.
      
      ii. *Example:* The dog knew he was not supposed to bark at the mailman, yet he did so enthusiastically.
   
   c. When using the conjunction at the beginning of the sentence, put the comma in the middle where the two independent clauses join.
      
      i. *Example:* So that I can enjoy my weekend, I decided to finish all my homework on Friday.
   
   d. When putting together individual ideas or phrases, you do not need a comma before the conjunction.
      
      i. *Example:* I will go to the store and buy something.
      
      ii. *Example:* I neither know nor care the reason why.

2. **Correlative Conjunctions** – Correlative conjunctions work in pairs. They connect together two equal grammatical terms, with one conjunction coming in front of each term. Each pair of conjunctions has a unique meaning that will enhance your sentence.

   Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Both/and</th>
<th>As much/as</th>
<th>Hardly/when</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whether/or</td>
<td>Just as/so</td>
<td>So/as</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tip:** A common grammar mistake is putting phrases together incorrectly to make run-on sentences, which are confusing and lengthy. Mastering conjunctions can help keep your writing clear and concise.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Either/or</th>
<th>Scarcely/when</th>
<th>So/that</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neither/nor</td>
<td>If/then</td>
<td>As many/as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not/but</td>
<td>No sooner/than</td>
<td>Barley/when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not only/but also</td>
<td>As/as</td>
<td>What with/and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Such/that</td>
<td>Rather/than</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Generally, you do not need to include a comma to separate correlative conjunction pairs.
   i. Example: Not only does the forest have lions and tigers but also bears!
   ii. Example: I don’t know whether I want to go to dinner or a movie.

b. However, if a comma is needed for other grammatical reasons like joining two independent clauses, it should be used even if a correlative conjunction pair is present.
   i. Example: Not only does the forest have lions and tigers, but it also has bears!
      1. Here, there is a new independent clause after the word tigers: “it also has bears.” Because that phrase could be a sentence on its own, separate the independent clauses.

3. **Subordinating Conjunctions** – Subordinating conjunctions are used to join together an independent clause and a dependent clause. These conjunctions are used to indicate cause-and-effect relationships, contrasts, or other kinds of connections between phrases.

**Examples:**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After</td>
<td>Although</td>
<td>As</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As if</td>
<td>As long as</td>
<td>As much as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As much as</td>
<td>As soon as</td>
<td>As though</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>By the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even if</td>
<td>Even though</td>
<td>If</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In order that</td>
<td>In case</td>
<td>In the event that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lest</td>
<td>Now that</td>
<td>Once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only</td>
<td>Only if</td>
<td>Provided that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since</td>
<td>So</td>
<td>Supposing</td>
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<td>That</td>
<td>Than</td>
<td>Though</td>
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<td>Till</td>
<td>Unless</td>
<td>Until</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When | Whenever | Where
---|---|---
Whereas | Wherever | Whether or not
While |  

a. If a subordinate conjunction is in the middle of the sentence, it generally *does not* need a comma before it.  
   i. *Example:* I will be there *as soon as* possible.  
   ii. *Example:* They will keep working *until* the end of the day.

b. If a subordinate conjunction begins a sentence, that whole clause is followed by a comma.  
   i. *Example:* *Whenever* I have pizza, I order it with a lot of toppings.  
   ii. *Example:* *While* I do enjoy going to the movie theater, I would rather rent a movie and watch it at home.

**More Examples**

1. *Combine these sentences:* I like to play board games. I enjoy watching movies.  
   a. **Incorrect:** I like to play board games and I enjoy watching movies.  
      i. Here, the coordinating conjunction “and” combines two independent clauses, so there needs to be a comma before “and.”
   b. **Correct (A):** I enjoy playing board games, and I enjoy watching movies.  
   c. **Correct (B):** I enjoy playing board games and watching movies.  
      i. You can remove the second subject and verb so that you use the same verb, “enjoy,” to refer to how you feel about both board games and watching movies.

2. *Combine these sentences:* I am not tired. I am not hungry.  
   a. **Incorrect:** I am not tired I am not hungry.  
      i. If you combine two complete sentences without a conjunction, it is a run-on sentence.
   b. **Correct:** I am neither tired nor hungry.  
      i. Using the correlative conjunctions “neither” and “nor” allows you to negate both adjectives at the same time.

3. *Combine these sentences:* I am your best friend. I will do everything I can to help you.  
   a. **Correct (A):** I am your best friend, and I will do everything I can to help you.  
      i. Here, the word “and” functions like a + sign. It’s very simple. However, if you use a subordinating conjunction instead, you can more clearly show the relationship here.
   b. **Correct (B):** As long as I am your best friend, I will do everything I can to help you.  
      i. This way, the connection between the two sentences is abundantly clear: the reason the speaker will do everything they can to help their friend is because of that friendship.