

BELLTES ACADEMY

The Complete Guide to English Conjunctions

Written by Belltes Khoza

Introduction to Conjunctions

In English, **conjunctions** are words that connect other words, phrases, or clauses together. Because there are hundreds of subordinating conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs, it is impossible to list every single one, but they are categorized into **four main distinct groups**.

1. Coordinating Conjunctions (FANBOYS)

Rule / When to use: Use these to connect words, phrases, or independent clauses of equal grammatical rank.

- **For:** Connects an action with its cause or reason. Use it in formal writing where you might otherwise use 'because'.

Example 1: We stayed indoors, for it was pouring rain outside.

Example 2: She decided to trust him, for he had never lied to her before.

- **And:** Connects two or more items, thoughts, or actions that are similar or sequential.

Example 1: He ordered a burger and a side of fries.

Example 2: The technician fixed the router, and the internet came back online.

- **Nor:** Connects two negative options. It is almost always preceded by a negative statement and triggers a subject-verb inversion.

Example 1: She does not eat dairy, nor does she eat meat.

Example 2: They will not agree to the terms, nor will they compromise on the price.

- **But:** Introduces a stark contrast, an exception, or an opposing idea to the first clause.

Example 1: I wanted to go to the beach, but it started to storm.

Example 2: The task was incredibly difficult, but she managed to finish it on time.

- **Or:** Presents a choice, a preference, or mutually exclusive alternatives.

Example 1: You can have hot coffee, or you can choose iced tea.

Example 2: We must leave right now, or we will miss our flight.

- **Yet:** Links a surprising or unexpected contrast. Use it when the second thought happens despite what was stated in the first thought.

Example 1: The movie received terrible reviews, yet it became a box office hit.

Example 2: He studied for months, yet he still felt unprepared for the exam.

- **So:** Connects a cause to its direct effect, consequence, or result.

Example 1: The store was closed, so we drove back home.

Example 2: He missed the last bus, so he had to take a taxi instead.

2. Correlative Conjunctions

Rule / When to use: Use these pairs to connect elements that mirror each other structurally. **Rule of parallelism:** The grammatical structure following the first word must match the structure following the second word.

- **Both... and:** Use to give equal emphasis to two positive, connected facts or elements.

Example 1: Both the manager and the employee received a formal warning.

Example 2: She is both an exceptionally talented musician and a skilled painter.

- **Either... or:** Use to present a choice between exactly two distinct possibilities.

Example 1: Either you finish your homework now, or you cannot watch TV.

Example 2: We can either dine in at the restaurant or order takeaway.

- **Neither... nor:** Use to reject two possibilities simultaneously.

Example 1: Neither the public nor the local government supported the new tax.

Example 2: He has neither the time nor the money to take a vacation this month.

- **Not only... but also:** Use to add emphasis to a second, often more surprising, piece of information.

Example 1: Not only did she win the marathon, but she also broke the course record.

Example 2: The book is not only educational, but it is also highly entertaining.

- **Whether... or:** Use to express doubt or an indirect choice between two alternative conditions.

Example 1: I am going to buy this car whether you approve of it or not.

Example 2: We need to decide whether to stay home or go out tonight.

3. Subordinating Conjunctions

Rule / When to use: Use these to link an independent main clause to a dependent clause.

Punctuation rule: If the dependent clause comes first, place a comma after it. If it comes second, do not use a comma.

- **Because / Since / As:** Use to state a direct cause or explanation. 'Because' gives the strongest emphasis to the reason itself.

Example 1: The game was postponed because the field was completely flooded.

Example 2: Since you are already heading upstairs, could you bring down my jacket?

- **Although / Even though:** Use to show concession or a direct obstacle. 'Even though' creates the strongest contrast.

Example 1: Although he was exhausted, he stayed up late to finish his project.

Example 2: She decided to walk to work, even though it was freezing outside.

- **If / Unless:** Use to set up a condition. 'Unless' means 'if... not' and introduces the exception that voids a statement.

Example 1: If it rains tomorrow, our outdoor picnic will be cancelled.

Example 2: You will not pass the final exam unless you start studying every day.

- **While / Whereas:** Use to contrast two simultaneous facts, situations, or points of view.

Example 1: While I prefer classical music, my brother loves heavy metal.

Example 2: The kitchen was tidy, whereas the living room was a complete mess.

- **After / Before / Until:** Use to establish the exact time frame, sequence, or duration of an event relative to another.

Example 1: We went out for ice cream after the movie ended.

Example 2: Do not open the oven door until the timer rings.

4. Conjunctive Adverbs

Rule / When to use: Use these to transition between two separate, complete thoughts. **Punctuation rule:** Use a semicolon before them and a comma immediately after them when joining two independent clauses in a single sentence.

- **Therefore / Consequently:** Use to indicate a logical deduction, mathematical certainty, or direct final result.

Example 1: The company lost a massive contract; therefore, profits dropped significantly.

Example 2: He forgot to water his plants for a month; consequently, they all died.

- **However / Nonetheless:** Use to pivot the conversation to a major counterpoint or modification of the previous thought.

Example 1: I deeply respect your opinion; however, I completely disagree with your conclusion.

Example 2: The team faced numerous injuries; nonetheless, they won the championship match.

- **Moreover / Furthermore:** Use to add a heavy piece of supporting evidence that strengthens your original argument.

Example 1: This phone has an incredible camera; moreover, the battery life lasts for days.

Example 2: The museum charges no admission fee; furthermore, it offers free guided tours.

- **Otherwise:** Use to warn of the negative outcome or alternative reality that will happen if a condition is not met.

Example 1: You must back up your files immediately; otherwise, you risk losing all your data.

Example 2: Please write down the address; otherwise, you might forget it.