

The Coordinating Conjunction

Recognize a *coordinating conjunction* when you see one.

And, but, for, nor, or, so, and yet—these are the seven coordinating conjunctions. To remember all seven, you might want to learn one of these acronyms: *FANBOYS, YAFNOBS, or FONYBAS.*

F = for
A = and
N = nor
B = but
O = or
Y = yet
S = so

Y = yet
A = and
F = for
N = nor
O = or
B = but
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F = for
O = or
N = nor
Y = yet
B = but
A = and
S = so

Coordinating conjunctions connect words, phrases, and clauses. Look at the examples that follow:

The bowl of squid eyeball stew is hot *and* delicious.

The squid eyeball stew is so thick that you can eat it with a fork *or* spoon.

Rocky, my orange tomcat, loves having his head scratched *but* hates getting his claws trimmed.

Rocky terrorizes the poodles next door *yet* adores the German shepherd across the street.

Rocky refuses to eat dry cat food, *nor* will he touch a saucer of squid eyeball stew.

I hate to waste a single drop of squid eyeball stew, *for* it is expensive and

time-consuming to make.

Even though I added cream to the squid eyeball stew, Rocky ignored his serving,
so I got a spoon and ate it myself.

Understand the difference between coordination and subordination.

A coordinating conjunction can join two **main clauses** that a writer wants to emphasize equally. The pattern for coordination looks like this:

MAIN CLAUSE + , + coordinating
conjunction + **MAIN CLAUSE** .

Subordination, however, emphasizes the idea in the main clause more than the one in the **subordinate clause**. Generally, the patterns look like these:

MAIN CLAUSE + Ø + **SUBORDINATE**
CLAUSE .

SUBORDINATE CLAUSE + , + **MAIN**
CLAUSE .

Read the pairs of sentences that follow. The first version coordinates the two ideas. The second version subordinates one idea to emphasize the other.

To survive the fetal pig dissection,
Rinalda agreed to make all of the
incisions, **and** Frances promised to
remove and label the organs.

To survive the fetal pig dissection,
Rinalda agreed to make all of the
incisions **if** Frances would promise to
remove and label the organs.

Diana stared dreamily at the handsome
Mr. McKenzie, **but** Olivia, who hated
economics, furiously jiggled her foot,
impatient to escape the boring class.

While Diana was staring dreamily at the
handsome Mr. McKenzie, Olivia furiously

jiggled her foot, impatient to escape the boring economics class that she hated.

At a red light, Maria jumped out of Gino's car and slammed the door, **for** she could not tolerate one more minute of the heavy metal music that Gino insisted on blasting from the stereo.

At a red light, Maria jumped out of Gino's car and slammed the door **because** she could not tolerate one more minute of the heavy metal music that Gino insisted on blasting from the stereo.

Making an A in Anatomy and Physiology has not helped Sima choose a career. She might decide to make her parents happy and go to medical school, **or** she might use her knowledge of the human body to become a sculptor.

Making an A in Anatomy and Physiology has not helped Sima choose a career. **Although** she might decide to make her parents happy and go to medical school, she might also use her knowledge of the human body to become a sculptor.

Kyle refused to eat the salad served with the meal, **nor** would he touch any green vegetable put on his plate.

After Kyle refused the salad served with the meal, he then would not touch the green vegetables put on his plate.

Joe spent seven hours studying calculus at the Mexican diner, **so** now he can set his math book on fire with his salsa breath.

Since Joe spent seven hours studying calculus at Taco Bell, he can now set his math book on fire with his salsa breath.

Because she gets seasick, Danielle is dreading the spring break cruise, **yet** she might enjoy herself once she

realizes how many cute guys in skimpy bathing suits parade the decks.

Even though Danielle is dreading getting seasick on the spring break cruise, she will probably enjoy herself once she realizes how many cute guys in skimpy bathing suits parade the decks.

Punctuate coordinating conjunctions correctly.

Three patterns in writing use coordinating conjunctions. Add commas when required.

Pattern 1 — Connecting two main clauses

When you connect two **main clauses** with a coordinating conjunction, use a comma. The pattern looks like this:

MAIN CLAUSE + , + coordinating
conjunction + **MAIN CLAUSE** .

Here is an example:

While I am at work, my dog
Floyd sleeps on the bed , *and*
my cat Buster naps in the
bathtub.

Pattern 2 — Connecting two items

You can also use a coordinating conjunction to connect any two items. These items can be any grammatical unit *except* main clauses. The pattern looks like this:

ITEM + Ø + coordinating
conjunction + **ITEM**

Here are some examples:

My dog Floyd has too many
fleas *and* too much hair.

My cat Buster has beautiful
blue eyes *but* a destructive

personality.

Pattern 3 — Connecting three or more items in a series

When you have three or more items in a series, you generally use a comma before the coordinating conjunction. Some handbooks and style guides will tell you that this comma is optional, but my advice is to put it in. The pattern looks like this:

ITEM + , + **ITEM** + , +

coordinating conjunction + **ITEM**

Here is an example:

Swatting olives off the kitchen counter, dragging toilet paper streamers through the house, *and* terrorizing Jacques Cousteau, the parakeet, has consumed another of Buster's days.

Yes, you can begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction!

Some teachers warn that beginning a sentence with a coordinating conjunction is wrong. Teachers will typically tell you this because they are trying to help you avoid writing **fragments**. Other times teachers give this advice because their *preference* is that a sentence not begin with a coordinating conjunction.

What you should remember is that you break no *grammar* rule if you begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction. Because you might be breaking your instructors' rules, however, you should ask what *their* preferences are.

If you decide to begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction, keep these three things in mind:

- Be sure that a main clause follows the coordinating conjunction.
- Do not use a coordinating conjunction to begin every sentence. Use this option only when it makes the flow of your ideas more effective.

- Do *not* use a comma *after* the coordinating conjunction. Coordinating conjunctions are not transitional expressions like *for example* or *first of all*. You will rarely use punctuation after them.

Here are some examples:

While I was answering the telephone, Buster, my cat, jumped onto the kitchen counter and swatted all of my jalapeño-stuffed olives onto the dirty kitchen floor. **So** I had to rinse off the cat hair and crumbs sticking to these delicacies before I could add them to the salad.

Flying down the bumpy path, Genette hit a rock with the front wheel of her mountain bike, flew over the handlebars, and crashed into a clump of prickly palmetto bushes. **Yet** even this accident would not deter her from completing the race.

Only when an interrupter immediately follows the coordinating conjunction do you need to use commas. Read this example:

We hoped that decorating the top of Christine's cupcake with a dead grasshopper would freak her out. But, **to our amazement**, she just popped the whole thing in her mouth, chewed, and swallowed.

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