Coordinating Conjunctions

Introduction

Conjunctions play a pivotal role in connecting our thoughts and ideas. They are the bridges that link words, phrases, and clauses together, giving our sentences structure and coherence. Without them, our language would be fragmented and disjointed.

Among the various types of conjunctions, **coordinating conjunctions** hold a special place. They are capable of joining two equal grammatical elements, whether they are simple words, phrases, or independent clauses.

In this lesson, we will delve deep into the world of coordinating conjunctions. We will explore their definition, their types, and their uses to create sophisticated and nuanced sentence structures.

What are Coordinating Conjunctions?

Coordinating conjunctions are words that join two or more words, phrases, or clauses so that each conjoined element is equal. In other words, the elements that the coordinating conjunctions connect are similar in terms of their grammatical structure.

There are seven coordinating conjunctions in English: **For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So (FANBOYS)**.

Let's look at some examples:

For: It explains reason or purpose (similar to 'because').
- Example: "He must be tired, **for** he has been working since morning."

The conjunction **'for'** is connecting two independent clauses and providing a reason for the first clause.

And: It adds one thing to another.
- Example: "She bought a dress **and** a pair of shoes."

The conjunction **'and'** is connecting two related actions performed by the same subject.

Nor: It presents an additional negative idea (used after 'neither').
- Example: "He neither likes tea **nor** coffee."

The conjunction **'nor'** is connecting two negative ideas about the same subject.

But: It shows contrast or exception.
- Example: "I wanted to buy that book, **but** it was too expensive."

The conjunction **'but'** is showing a contrast between wanting to buy the book and its high cost.

Or: It presents an alternative or choice.
- Example: "You can have tea **or** coffee."

The conjunction **'or'** is presenting two alternatives for the user to choose from.

Yet: It introduces a contrast or exception (similar to 'but').
- Example: "It's a small car, **yet** it's surprisingly spacious inside."

The conjunction **'yet'** is showing a contrast between the size of the car and the space inside it.

So: It indicates effect, result, or consequence.
- Example: "He was feeling sick, **so** he went to the doctor."

The conjunction **'so'** is indicating the result of the person feeling sick.

Usage of Coordinating Conjunctions

1 - Connecting similar words or phrases

Coordinating conjunctions are used to connect words of equal grammatical rank in a sentence.

In the example, "I like **apples** and **oranges**", the coordinating conjunction '**and**' is used to connect two similar words - 'apples' and 'oranges'.

Let's break it down:

- **"I like apples"** and **"I like oranges"** are two separate sentences. Each of these sentences makes sense on its own, and they have equal importance.
- The word 'and' is a coordinating conjunction that can be used to join these two sentences together. When we do this, we get: **"I like apples and oranges."**
- In this combined sentence, 'and' is connecting the similar words 'apples' and 'oranges'. These words are similar because they're both the direct objects of the verb 'like', and they're both types of fruit that the speaker enjoys.

So, the role of the coordinating conjunction 'and' in this sentence is to join two similar words, 'apples' and 'oranges', thereby allowing the speaker to express their liking for both apples and oranges in a single, coherent sentence.

2 - Connecting Similar Phrases

Coordinating conjunctions are used to connect phrases of equal grammatical rank in a sentence.

In the example, "She was running in the park **but** on the sidewalk", the coordinating conjunction 'but' is used to connect two similar phrases - 'in the park' and 'on the sidewalk'.

Let's break it down:

- **"She was running in the park"** and **"She was running on the sidewalk"** are two separate sentences. Each of these sentences makes sense on its own, and they have equal importance.
- The word 'but' is a coordinating conjunction that can be used to join these two sentences together. When we do this, we get: **"She was running in the park but on the sidewalk."**
- In this combined sentence, 'but' is connecting the similar phrases 'in the park' and 'on the sidewalk'. These phrases are similar because they're both prepositional phrases that describe where she was running. However, the use of 'but' indicates a contrast or difference between these two locations.

So, the role of the coordinating conjunction 'but' in this sentence is to join two similar phrases, 'in the park' and 'on the sidewalk'.

3 - Connecting Similar Clauses

Lastly, coordinating conjunctions are used to connect clauses of equal grammatical rank in a sentence.

In the example, "I wanted to go to the party, yet I had to study for an exam", the coordinating conjunction 'yet' is used to connect two similar clauses - 'I wanted to go to the party' and 'I had to study for an exam'.

Let's break it down:

- **"I wanted to go to the party"** and **"I had to study for an exam"** are two separate sentences. Each of these sentences makes sense on its own, and they have equal importance.

- The word 'yet' is a coordinating conjunction that can be used to join these two sentences together. When we do this, we get: **"I wanted to go to the party, yet I had to study for an exam."**
- In this combined sentence, 'yet' is connecting the similar clauses 'I wanted to go to the party' and 'I had to study for an exam'. These clauses are similar because they're both independent clauses that could stand alone as complete sentences. However, the use of 'yet' indicates a contrast or conflict between these two actions.

So, the role of the coordinating conjunction 'yet' in this sentence is to join two similar clauses, 'I wanted to go to the party' and 'I had to study for an exam', thereby allowing the speaker to express a conflict between wanting to go to the party and needing to study for an exam in a single, coherent sentence.

Joining Independent Clauses to Create Compound Sentences.

An independent clause is a group of words that can stand alone as a sentence; it has a subject and a verb and forms a complete thought.

When two independent clauses are connected by a coordinating conjunction, a comma usually precedes the conjunction. If the independent clauses are very short and closely related, the comma might be omitted.

Here are examples of how each coordinating conjunction can be used to join independent clauses:

For:

The conjunction "for" is used to indicate the reason or purpose for something. It is similar in meaning to "because" or "since," but it is used less frequently in modern English.

When "for" is used as a coordinating conjunction, it introduces a clause that explains the reason or cause for what was stated in the main clause.

Let's break down this example:

- "She must be tired, **for** she has been working since morning."

This sentence contains two independent clauses: "**She must be tired**" and "**she has been working since morning**." Each of these clauses can stand alone as a complete sentence because they each have a subject ("she") and a verb ("must be" and "has been working"), and they each express a complete thought.

The conjunction "**for**" is used to connect these two independent clauses. The clause "she has been working since morning" provides the reason or explanation for the statement made in the first clause ("She must be tired").

In other words, the speaker believes that "she" must be tired. The reason the speaker holds this belief is explained in the second clause: "she" has been working since morning.

The conjunction "for" serves to link these two thoughts together into one sentence, showing the cause-and-effect relationship between them.

And:

The conjunction "and" is one of the most frequently used coordinating conjunctions. It is primarily used to connect words, phrases, and clauses of the same type, indicating a sense of continuation or addition.

When "and" is used to join independent clauses, it adds one clause to another, indicating that the actions or states described in the clauses are related and happen in sequence or simultaneously.

Let's break down this example:

- "I called him, **and** he immediately picked up the phone."

This sentence contains two independent clauses: "**I called him**" and "**he immediately picked up the phone**." Each of these clauses can stand alone as a complete sentence because they each have a subject ("I" and "he") and a verb ("called" and "picked up"), and they each express a complete thought.

The conjunction "**and**" is used to connect these two independent clauses. The clause "he immediately picked up the phone" is an additional event that happened after or at the same time as the event in the first clause ("I called him").

In other words, the speaker called him, and as a result or simultaneously, he picked up the phone. The conjunction "and" serves to link these two events together into one sentence, showing the sequence or simultaneity of events.

Nor:

The conjunction "**nor**" is used to introduce a negative statement that adds to or complements a previous negative statement. It essentially means "**and not**," and is often used in conjunction with "**neither**."

When "**nor**" is used to join independent clauses, it presents an additional negative idea related to the first clause. It's important to note that when "nor" is used in this way, the auxiliary verb and subject are inverted in the second clause. This is known as subject-auxiliary inversion.

Let's break down this example:
- "He didn't study, **nor** did he pass the exam."

This sentence contains two independent clauses: "**He didn't study**" and "**he did not pass the exam**." Each of these clauses can stand alone as a complete sentence because they each have a subject ("he") and a verb ("did not study" and "did not pass"), and they each express a complete thought.

The conjunction "**nor**" is used to connect these two independent clauses. The clause "**he did not pass the exam**" is an additional negative statement that adds to the first negative statement ("**He didn't study**").

In other words, the speaker is saying that not only did "he" not study, but he also did not pass the exam. The conjunction "nor" serves to link these two negative thoughts together into one sentence, showing the correlation between the two negative outcomes.

But:
The conjunction 'but' is a **coordinating conjunction** that connects two or more sentences, phrases, or clauses that could each stand alone as separate sentences. It's used to show a contrast or contradiction between the ideas expressed in these sentences, phrases, or clauses.

In the example, "It is a cheap car, **but** it is very reliable," the two clauses are:
1. "**It is a cheap car**"
2. "**It is very reliable**"

The conjunction **'but'** is used to connect these two clauses. The first clause suggests that the car might not be of high quality or desirable because it is cheap. However, the second clause contradicts this assumption by stating that the car is very reliable. The 'but' conjunction effectively highlights this contrast or contradiction.

So, the conjunction 'but' allows us to express complex, nuanced ideas by highlighting contrasts or contradictions between different pieces of information.

Or:

The conjunction 'or' is a **coordinating conjunction** that is used to link different possibilities or choices in a sentence. It connects words, phrases, or clauses of equal grammatical rank.

In the example, "You can have tea, **or** you can have coffee," the two alternatives are:

1. "**You can have tea**"
2. "**You can have coffee**"

The conjunction **'or'** is used to connect these two alternatives and present them as options to the listener or reader. The use of 'or' implies that you can choose one of the options, but not both. In other words, if you choose tea, you are not choosing coffee, and vice versa.

Yet:

The conjunction 'yet' is a **coordinating conjunction** that is often used to introduce a note of contrast or contradiction to the sentence or clause that precedes it. It's used to link together two ideas where the second idea is surprising or unexpected in light of the first.

In the example, "He is very rich, **yet** he lives a simple life," the two contrasting ideas are:

1. "**He is very rich**"
2. "**He lives a simple life**"

The conjunction **'yet'** is used to connect these two ideas. The first clause tells us that he is very rich, which might lead us to expect that he lives a luxurious or extravagant lifestyle. However, the second clause contradicts this expectation by stating that he lives a simple life. The 'yet' conjunction effectively highlights this contrast or unexpected result.

So, the conjunction 'yet' allows us to express complex, nuanced ideas by highlighting contrasts or unexpected results between different pieces of information.

So:

The conjunction 'so' is a **coordinating conjunction** that is used to indicate a cause-and-effect relationship between two clauses. It connects two independent clauses where the second clause is the result or effect of the first.

In the example, "He was hungry, **so** he ate an apple," the two related ideas are:

1. "**He was hungry**"
2. "**He ate an apple**"

The conjunction **'so'** is used to connect these two clauses. The first clause states a condition or cause ("He was hungry"), and the second clause presents the result or effect of that condition ("He ate an apple"). The use of 'so' implies that the action in the second clause (eating an apple) occurred as a direct result of the condition in the first clause (being hungry).

The Use of Commas with Coordinating Conjunctions

 - You should place a comma before the coordinating conjunction when it is used to connect two main clauses.

A main clause is a part of a sentence that can stand alone because it contains a subject and a verb and forms a complete thought.

Here's an example:
- "Tom prepared dinner, **and** Jane washed the dishes."

In this sentence, "**Tom prepared dinner**" and "**Jane washed the dishes**" are both main clauses because each of them forms a complete sentence with a subject and a verb. The coordinating conjunction "and" is used to connect these two main clauses, and a comma is placed before it.

So, when you join two main clauses with a coordinating conjunction, you should use a comma before the conjunction.

 - You do not use a comma to connect two elements that are not main clauses.

Here are a couple of examples:
- "She likes pink and purple."

In this sentence, "**She likes pink**" is a main clause because it has a subject ("She") and a verb ("likes"), and it forms a complete thought. However, "**purple**" is just a simple word, not a main clause. Therefore, no comma is used before the coordinating conjunction "**and**".

- "He is young but mature."

In this sentence, "**He is young**" is a main clause, but "**mature**" is just a simple word. Therefore, *no comma* is used before the coordinating conjunction "**but**".

So, when you join two elements that are not both main clauses with a coordinating conjunction, you should not use a comma before the conjunction.

- The use of a comma before the coordinating conjunction is optional with a list of three or more items. This is often referred to as the Oxford comma or serial comma.

Here are a couple of examples:
- "She likes pink, purple and red."
- "She likes pink, purple, and red."

In both sentences, the list of items (pink, purple, red) is connected by the coordinating conjunction "and". In the first sentence, no comma is used before "and". In the second sentence, a comma is used before "and". Both structures are valid in grammar.

So, when a coordinating conjunction is used with a list of three or more items, the use of a comma before the conjunction is optional. This can depend on personal or institutional style preferences. Both ways are grammatically correct and widely accepted. However, some people prefer to use the Oxford comma to avoid any potential ambiguity.

Exercises and Practice

- Fill in the blanks with appropriate coordinating conjunctions:

a. I wanted to play outside, _____ it was raining.

b. She loves to read books, _____ she doesn't like to write.

c. He can play the guitar, _____ he can also sing.

d. I am tired, _____ I must finish my homework.

- Combine the following sentences using a coordinating conjunction:

a. I love chocolate. I don't like vanilla.

b. She is smart. She is very hardworking.

c. He didn't study. He passed the exam.

d. It's a sunny day. We decided to go for a picnic.

- Identify the coordinating conjunction in the following sentences:

a. I like to play basketball, but I am not very good at it.

b. She studied hard for the test, yet she didn't pass.

c. I wanted to go to the party, so I finished my work early.

d. He didn't have a car, nor did he have a bike.

- Write a compound sentence using each of the following coordinating conjunctions:

a. **For**: b. **And**: c. **Nor**: d. **But**: e. **Or**: f. **Yet**: g. **So**:

- Rewrite the following sentences by adding a coordinating conjunction and making them into one sentence:

a. She loves to dance. She is very shy.

b. I want to go to the beach. It is too cold outside.

c. He loves to read. He doesn't have a library card.

d. They want to watch a movie. They have a lot of homework.

- Correct the misuse of the coordinating conjunction in the following sentences:

a. I love to play soccer, but I don't have a ball.

b. She wants to go to the party, yet she wasn't invited.

c. He didn't study for the test, so he got an A.

d. They are very tired, and they stayed up all night.

Conclusion

Coordinating conjunctions hold the power to transform our sentences, making them more dynamic and interconnected. They serve as the bridges that link our ideas, allowing us to express complex thoughts with clarity and coherence. This lesson helped us explore the world of coordinating conjunctions, their functions, usage, and the pivotal role they play in enhancing our communication.

Whether you're a language learner, a seasoned writer, or someone looking to refine your English skills, understanding coordinating conjunctions is a step towards mastering the language.