

Coordinating Conjunction (FANBOYS)

Definition

A coordinating conjunction can be used to join words, phrases, or clauses. Each of the conjunctions is used for a different purpose because every conjunction has a different meaning. Below is a list of the seven conjunctions, their meanings, and an example.

Conjunction	Meaning	Example
For	A conjunction used to express the cause of a cause-effect relationship by explaining the cause of a fact that is stated before or after it.	I went to the store, <i>for</i> I was out of milk.
And	A conjunction used to list two or more items that are seen as equal or to make two or more statements that are seen as equally true.	I enjoy watching movies <i>and</i> singing karaoke.
		Galileo is the father of modern science, <i>and</i> Chaucer is the father of modern literature.
Nor	A conjunction paired with another negation (neither or not) in order to negate the second item.	I have not seen his new film, <i>nor</i> do I intend to see it.
		Neither wind <i>nor</i> rain will keep me from going home for the holidays.
But	A conjunction used to introduce a word or phrase that is exempted from the statement that precedes it or to introduce a clause that contradicts the one that precedes it.	Bobby enjoys playing basketball <i>but</i> not baseball.
		Stacy can meet you at the restaurant, <i>but</i> I will meet you both at the movie theater.
Or	A conjunction used to list two or more alternative choices.	You cannot bring outside food <i>or</i> beverages into the fairgrounds.
Yet	A conjunction, which by definition means “nevertheless” or “notwithstanding,” that is used to provide additional information or another fact that would not naturally appear to follow the information that came before.	English 1A is the most difficult class you can take, <i>yet</i> it is also the most rewarding.
So	A conjunction used to express the effect of a cause-effect relationship by explaining what happened as a result of the fact that was stated before or after it.	I was out of milk, <i>so</i> I went to the store.

Choosing your conjunction based on the meaning of the word and the logical connection you are trying to make is important, but you must also consider whether you are listing words, phrases, or clauses. The items being listed, whether a group of words, two or more phrases, or two clauses, will determine both the conjunction you can use and the punctuation of your sentence.

What is being listed?	Can the coordinating conjunction list this type of item?		Does it need a comma?	Example
Words	For	NO		
	And	YES	NO	John and Mary were at the party.
	Nor	YES	NO	Neither Bob nor Jill was there.
	But	YES	NO	Mary was there but not Jill.
	Or	YES	NO	Was there cake or ice cream?
	Yet	YES	NO	The cake was dry yet delicious.
	So	NO		
Phrases	For	NO		
	And	YES	NO	The laundry was washed by hand and dried in the sun.
	Nor	YES	NO	The laundry was neither washed by hand nor dried in the sun.
	But	YES	NO	The laundry was washed by hand but not dried in the sun.
	Or	YES	NO	We can either wash the laundry by hand or dry it in the sun.
	Yet	YES	NO	Hand washing your laundry is time consuming yet better for your clothing.
	So	NO		
Clauses	For	YES	YES	I stopped at Starbucks, for we were out of coffee at home.
	And	YES	YES	I ordered a soy latte, and my friend had a peppermint mocha.
	Nor	YES	YES	I did not add sugar to my coffee, nor did my friend add anything to hers.
	But	YES	YES	I enjoyed my latte, but she did not like her peppermint mocha.
	Or	YES	YES	Next time, she will order a different drink, or she may order a pastry instead.
	Yet	YES	YES	Many people drink coffee to get a boost of energy, yet I find drinking coffee relaxing.
	So	YES	YES	We were out of coffee at home, so I stopped at Starbucks.

There are several points to note in the table above. First, notice that neither *so* nor *for* can be used to connect words or phrases. This is because both words have other functions in addition to being coordinating conjunctions: *so* can also modify adjectives and adverbs and *for* is a preposition. When you use *so* with an adjective or adverb, you stress the extent or degree. For instance, *so windy*, *so late*, and *so slowly* stress the fact that it was windy, that something was late, or that something was done slowly, respectively. Due to this usage, as well as the numerous other meanings of the word, *so* as a coordinating conjunction cannot be used with words or phrases.

Like *so*, *for* has multiple meanings as a preposition. When followed by a person or recipient, *for* can be used to express who or what is receiving an action: *I opened the bottle for her*. Here, the *for* in the sentence indicates that the action and the effects of the action (an opened bottle) were done for someone else. *For*, like many other prepositions, can also be used to express a time span (*They were gone for two weeks.*) or distance (*We ran for three miles.*). Because of these other meanings, *for*, like *so*, cannot be used with words or phrases but must be used with complete clauses.

Second, notice that a comma is necessary when combining two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction. An independent clause is a complete grammatical unit and must have at least one subject and one verb. Because it has a subject and verb, it represents its own independent thought, which is separate from the thoughts before it and those after it. Since it is its own thought, you must use a comma to separate one complete clause from the other.

Consider the example below. Example 1 uses the coordinating conjunction *and* with an extra word. In this sentence, there is only one action and only one thought. The *and* is simply adding a subject to the sentence. Instead of saying that only Mary or only John were at the party, the author used the *and* to stress that both were there. Since there are not two separate clauses or separate thoughts here, we do not need to add a comma.

Example 1: John and Mary were at the party.

Example 2 uses the coordinating conjunction *and* with an extra phrase. In this sentence, there are two actions but only one subject, so there are not two separate and complete thoughts or clauses. Both *washed by hand* and *dried in the sun* describe what was done to the laundry. Since *laundry* is the subject for both of these, we cannot put a comma before the *and*.

Example 2: The laundry was washed by hand and dried in the sun.

Example 3 uses the coordinating conjunction *and* to combine two independent clauses. As you can see, there are two subjects and two verbs in the sentence, and each subject is paired with one of the verb, making two complete thoughts or clauses. The first subject and verb tell the reader what the author ordered and the second pair tells the reader what the author's friend had. Thus, we need to include a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

Example 3: I ordered a soy latte, and my friend had a peppermint mocha.

Exercise

Add the coordinating conjunction that best goes with the context of the sentence. Remember to review the chart on the first page when doing this exercise.

1. I went home _____ went to bed.
2. The university lets me pay my fees as one large sum now _____ as a few payments over time.
3. Brian rushed home after work to watch his favorite show, _____ it was a rerun.
4. She went to the nicest store in town to buy a dress, _____ she was going to a wedding on Saturday.
5. He apologized for cheating, _____ they played another game.
6. Molly was neither dressed _____ finished packing.
7. The marathon was so hard that she wanted to quit, _____ she stuck with it and finished the race in second place.

Indicate whether the following sentences should get a comma. Circle the Y for yes or the N for no. Remember to review the chart on the second page when doing this exercise.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| Y | N | 1. Mary and Steven went to New Orleans this weekend. |
| Y | N | 2. We can go out to eat or we can try to see a movie. |
| Y | N | 3. Cathy was finally on her dream vacation yet she was feeling quite homesick. |
| Y | N | 4. We had the day off so we decided to go to the beach. |
| Y | N | 5. I enjoy vacations but detest packing. |

Exercise 1 Answer Key: 1. and, 2. or, 3. but, 4. for, 5. so, 6. nor, 7. yet

Exercise 2 Answer Key: 1. N, 2. Y, 3. Y, 4. Y, 5. N