

Compound Sentences and Coordination

Mary Westervelt

Reference: Ann Hogue (2003) *The Essentials of English: A Writer's Handbook*. New York, Pearson Education, Inc.

When two sentences are combined in a way that shows they are of equal importance, the result is a **compound sentence**. Such a sentence contains two complete subject-predicate constructs. Each of the subject-predicate constructs could be an independent sentence; however, once they are connected, we call them **independent clauses**. To connect the independent clauses, we use one of the following:

- A **coordinate conjunction** (*and, but, or, nor, yet, so, for*)
- A **conjunctive adverb** (*however, therefore, etc.:* see other conjunctive adverbs below)
- A **semicolon (;) or colon (:)** alone

Let's look at each of these ways.

Coordinate conjunctions

The following chart lists the coordinate conjunctions, the meanings they signal, and some examples.

Conjunction	Relationship expressed	Example
and	addition	Richard is graduating from high school this year, and he is hoping to go to college in the fall.
but	contrast	He applied to ten universities, but he only visited three of them.
or	choice	His friends warned him that he should visit all of them, or he would reduce his chances of being admitted.
nor	negative addition	His feeling was that he didn't need to have interviews at every university, nor did he need to see the campuses himself.
so	cause-effect (result)	He lives in Pennsylvania, so he didn't visit the universities in California.
yet	contrast (surprise)	UCLA is three thousand miles from his home, yet it is his first choice.
for	cause-effect (reason)	His parents are hoping that he gets accepted at the University of Pennsylvania, for that school is much close to their home.

NOTE: the clause introduced by *nor* uses unusual word order, and the operator (or helping verb) *do* must be used in cases with no other operator. Review the example above, and this one:

- You can't expect people to call you right away.
- You shouldn't be angry if they forget.

→ • You can't expect people to call you right away, *nor should you* be angry if they forget.

Conjunctive adverbs. When connecting sentences with a **conjunctive adverb**, put a semicolon before the adverb and a comma after it. A conjunctive adverb may also begin a sentence; in that case, of course it does not have a semicolon before it. However, it is still followed by a comma. The chart below lists the adverbs, their meanings, and some examples.

NOTE: Some conjunctive adverbs can occur at the beginning of a sentence, at the end, or between the subject and the predicate. Note the punctuation in each case:

- We were waiting in the restaurant for our friends to appear. *Meanwhile*, they were waiting for us at home.
- We had told them that we would meet them at the restaurant. They, *however*, thought we had said we would pick them up.
- We should have solved the problem by communicating better; we could have called them, *for example*.

Relationship	Conjunctive adverbs	Examples
Addition	<i>also, besides, furthermore, in addition, moreover</i>	I don't want to continue this phone conversation; <i>moreover</i> , I have a meeting in five minutes.
Contrast (complete)	<i>however, in contrast, on the other hand</i>	I would like to continue talking with you; <i>however</i> , I have a meeting in five minutes.
Contrast (partial)	<i>however, nevertheless, nonetheless, still</i>	I have a meeting in five minutes; <i>nevertheless</i> , I'll talk to you now.
Result	<i>as a result, consequently, therefore, thus</i>	I have a meeting in five minutes; <i>as a result</i> , we'll have to cut this conversation short.
Sequence	<i>afterward, meanwhile, then, subsequently</i>	I have a meeting in five minutes; <i>afterward</i> , I'd like to continue this conversation with you.
Comparison	<i>likewise, similarly</i>	I have a meeting in five minutes; <i>similarly</i> , John has a pressing obligation as well.
Example	<i>for example, for instance</i>	I have meetings every day; <i>for example</i> , today I have a meeting in five minutes.

Based on Hogue (2003)p. 35

Connecting two independent clauses with just a semicolon or colon

Connecting two clauses with a semicolon is effective when the two sentences are both forceful.

- Many farms were destroyed in the flood; many people were left homeless.

The words after a colon restate, explain or exemplify the word before the colon:

- My mother had a full-time job: she always made sure that we had meals, clean clothes and a secure place to call home.

NOTE: Do not use a colon to separate the verb from the rest of the predicate. Only use it when the part after the colon restates or develops what came before.

Two important characteristics of a good teacher are: patience and enthusiasm.
(Incorrect)

- Two important characteristics of a good teacher are patience and enthusiasm.
- Among the important characteristics of a good teacher are the following: patience with slow or uncooperative students, and enthusiasm for teaching the subject.

(NOTE: in the second example, a comma separates the two phrases, *patience with slow or uncooperative students* and *enthusiasm for teaching the subject*. Usually, we don't use a comma in lists of only two items (*apples and oranges*, for example). However, in this case each of the two items is a long phrase. A comma will help the reader to know when one phrase has ended and the other has begun.)

Connecting words or word groups within a sentence

Coordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *or*, *but*, and *yet* can also be used to connect equal words or word groups:

- I like ice cream *and* cake.
- I *don't* like ice cream *or* cake.
- We can eat early *or* late; it doesn't matter to me.
- I was tired *but* happy when I completed the project.

- The weather was sunny *yet* cold.

Some correlative conjunctions consist of sets of two or three words: *both...and*, *not only...but also*, *either ...or*, *neither...nor*, and *whether...or*. Here are some examples:

- John is well-qualified for the position. George is well-qualified for the position. →

• *Both John and George* are well-qualified for the position.
(This simple sentence has a compound subject: *John and George*. Because the subject is plural, the verb is plural: *are*.)

- I don't know whether to go to the party. I don't know whether to stay home. →

• I don't know *whether* to go to the party *or* to stay home.
(This simple sentence has a compound object: *to go to the party or to stay home*.)

NOTE: When connecting whole sentences, *not only...but also* is like *nor* in that word order changes after the negative half (*not only*), and the helping verb (the 'operator') must be present:

- He took us to the fanciest restaurant in town. He insisted on paying. →
- *Not only **did** he take* us to the fanciest restaurant in town, *but* he insisted on paying.

Parallel structure

When you use correlative conjunctions, make sure that the parts you connect are parallel, or matching. In other words, connect nouns to nouns, infinitives to infinitives, and the like. Study the following examples:

- ☒ On weekends I like to stay at home and working in my garden.

What do I like? Two things:

1. to stay at home (infinitive phrase)
2. working in my garden (-ing phrase)

Correct this by making both phrases match:

- On weekends I like to stay at home and work in my garden. (The second *to* may be omitted.)
- On weekends I like staying at home and working in my garden.

- ☒ I couldn't decide whether to eat out or maybe I should cook at home. →

- I couldn't decide whether to eat out or to cook at home.

With multi-word correlative conjunctions:

We plan to go either to the Statue of Liberty or the Metropolitan Museum.

To see what's wrong with this sentence, ask, "what are the choices in this sentence?"

Either + **prepositional** phrase: **to the Statue of Liberty**
Or + **noun** phrase: **the Metropolitan Museum.**

To make the sentence balanced or parallel, use two **prepositional** phrases:

• We plan to go either to the Statue of Liberty or to the Metropolitan Museum.

Another possible correction: We plan *either* to go to the Statue of Liberty, *or* to go to the Metropolitan Museum.

Can you repair the faulty parallelism in these sentences?

She neither wanted our advice nor our help.

Our new fax machine is efficient, inexpensive, and it is easy to operate.

Punctuation tips

1. Use a comma *and* a coordinating conjunction to connect two independent clauses. Review these sentences:

• Richard is graduating from high school this year, *and* he is hoping to go to college in the fall.

• He applied to ten universities, *but* he only visited three of them.

2. Using just a comma produces a *comma splice* and is incorrect. Compare these incorrect sentences with the ones in number one:

Richard is graduating from high school this year, he is hoping to go to college in the fall.

He applied to ten universities, he only visited three of them.

3. Use a conjunction without a comma to connect two phrases (groups of words):

• Richard is graduating from high school this year and hoping to go to college in the fall.

- He applied to ten universities but only visited three of them.

4. Before using just a semicolon to connect two sentences, make sure the logical connection between them is clear. Note that the connection is not clear in this example:

☒ My mother had a full-time job; she made sure that our whole family had meals.

Remember the earlier sentence? In that one, the **colon** indicated that the full-time job was preparing meals (and doing other household tasks). In the case of the sentence with a semicolon, the reader is confused. The writer might mean this:

- My mother had a full-time job, but she made sure that our whole family had meals.

5. When a conjunctive adverb begins the second of two independent clauses, use a semicolon before it and a comma after it. Using commas before and after the conjunctive is confusing to the reader. Compare two examples we looked at before:

- I would like to continue talking with you; *however*, I have a meeting in five minutes.
(The semicolon indicates that one complete idea is finished. The one that follows will contrast. NOTE: the semicolon could be a period [.])

- Our friends, *however*, thought we had said we would pick them up.
(The commas before and after *however* indicate that it is interrupting a complete idea. The contrast is really with the sentence before this one.)

For practice in detecting and correcting comma splices and sentence fragments, go to the website, *Writing Exercises for Engineers and Scientists*, at

<http://www.writing.eng.vt.edu/exercises/index.html>