

Rules for Using a Coordinating Conjunction

1. **Put a comma before the coordinating conjunction when it is used to connect two independent clauses.**

A **clause** is a group of words that contain a subject and a verb.

An **independent clause** (or **main clause**) expresses a complete thought. It can stand alone as a sentence. For example, "I like apples."

(A **dependent clause** does not express a complete thought. It cannot stand alone as a sentence. For example, "that I saw last month").

Examples of independent clauses:

- Tom walked the dog.

Subject = Tom

Verb = walked

"Tom walked the dog" is an independent clause.

- Tom grabbed the mail.

Subject = Tom

Verb = grabbed

"Tom grabbed the mail" is also an independent clause.

These two independent clauses can be **combined** with a coordinating conjunction. When we combine these two sentences, the second "Tom" will be changed to "he."

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Examples:

Tom walked the dog, so he grabbed the mail.

OR

Tom walked the dog, and he grabbed the mail.

Both parts of the sentence have a subject and verb (before and after the coordinating conjunction).

Here are a few more examples of coordinating conjunctions connecting independent clauses.

Incorrect: I want to go see a movie but my sister has my car.

Correct: I want to go see a movie, but my sister has my car.

Incorrect: Lisa loves cats yet she does not want one living in her house.

Correct: Lisa loves cats, yet she does not want one living in her house.

- 2. When using a coordinating conjunction to connect two items, do not use a comma. In the example above with Tom and his dog, we can leave out the comma if we do not have two independent clauses. We do this by leaving out the subject in the second part of the sentence (he).**

Example:

- Tom walked the dog and grabbed the mail.
("Tom walked the dog" is an independent clause, but "grabbed the mail" is not.)

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Here are a few more examples of how to use a coordinating conjunction to connect two items that are not independent clauses.

Incorrect: She likes apples, and bananas.

Correct: She likes apples and bananas.

Incorrect: My brother is young, but smart.

Correct: My brother is young but smart.

3. When using a coordinating conjunction with a list of items (three or more in number), the comma before the coordinating conjunction is optional.

You should put or leave out the comma before the coordinating conjunction based on the style guide you are using.

Example with comma:

- She is cooking chicken, potatoes, corn, and carrot.

Example without comma:

- She is cooking chicken, potatoes, corn and carrot.

Reference:

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