# Understanding Conjunctions

**By the end of this lesson you should be able to:**

* Identify the different types of conjunctions.
* Use correlative conjunctions correctly.
* Know where to place punctuation marks when using conjunctions.
* Use conjunctions in the right places when making use of subordinating clauses.

**Introduction**

The function of all conjunctions is to connect words in a sentence. A conjunction is a word, or set of words, that connects different words, phrases and clauses together in a sentence. It is informally called a ‘joining word’ because it acts like the glue that holds different parts of the sentence together.

We learn about conjunctions because using them makes writing clearer. Often, people do not use conjunctions and this sometimes makes their sentences very long and difficult to read. It is therefore important that you learn how to use conjunctions, so that your writing is easily accessible to your reader.

**LESSON PLAN**

There are three types of conjunctions:

1. **Coordinating conjunctions**

Coordinating conjunctions consist of only one word:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| and | or | but | so | for | nor | yet |

Example 1: *The citizens could not protest, for the president suppressed their freedom of speech.*

Notice how in the above example “for” connects the one part of the sentence “The citizens could not protest” to the other “the president suppressed their freedom of speech”.

Example 2: *Thando and Tracey worked together in class.*

Notice how the conjunction “and” connects the words “Thando” and “Tracey”.

Activity 1

**Write three sentences containing a coordinating conjunction.**

1. …………………………………………………………………………………………..
2. …………………………………………………………………………………………..
3. …………………………………………………………………………………………..
4. **Correlative conjunctions**

Correlative conjunctions consist of two connecting words:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| either/or | neither/nor |
| both/and | not only/but also |
| whether/or | as/as |
| not/but |  |

Example 1: *Your essay topic can either be on Weber’s idea of legitimacy or on electoral systems.*

In the above example, the correlative conjunctions either/or link the words in the rest of the sentence.

Example 2: *The students not only learnt about Weber’s idea of legitimacy, but also about the various electoral systems.*

In the above example the correlative conjunctions not only/but also link the words in the rest of the sentence.

Activity 2

**Write three sentences containing examples of correlative conjunctions.**

1. …………………………………………………………………………………………..
2. …………………………………………………………………………………………..
3. …………………………………………………………………………………………..
4. **Subordinating conjunctions**

Subordinating conjunctions link parts of a complex sentence. In a complex sentence, you have a main clause (which can stand on its own), and one or more subordinate (dependent) clauses. Subordinate clauses cannot stand on their own, precisely because they start with a subordinating conjunction. They have been made subordinate to the main clause so that we know they are less important and are just there to provide extra information.

The subordinating conjunction therefore has two functions:

1. Firstly, it tells us about the relationship between the main and subordinate clause.
2. Secondly, it signals that the subordinate clause is less important than the main clause – i.e. that the most important information is being conveyed by the main clause.

Example 1: *The students could not complete the exam, because they ran out of time.*

In the above example, the main clause is “The students could not complete the exam,” and the subordinate clause is “because they ran out of time”.

(Note that you cannot have a sentence that just says “Because they ran out of time.” It is an incomplete thought. That’s what makes it a subordinate clause: it needs a main clause for it to make sense.)

The subordinating conjunction “because” signals a shift from the main clause, “The students could not complete the exam”. It tells us that we are now dealing with further information about the main clause. In this example, the subordinate clause gives us a reason why the students could not complete the exam.

Subordinate clauses do not have to come after the main clause. They sometimes come before it, as in the example below:

Example 2: *Rather than being a peaceful transition, the process consisted of much political violence.*

In the above example, the main clause is “the process consisted of much political violence”. This can stand alone as a sentence. By adding the subordinate clause “rather than being a peaceful transition,” we are adding some additional information about the main clause. We are providing a contrast which highlights for the reader the significance of the violence being described, and reminds us of a possible alternative to what actually took place. The subordinating conjunction “rather than” links this additional thought to the main clause.

Other subordinating conjunctions include:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| as if | as long as | as though | because |
| before | even if | even though | if |
| if only | in order that | now that | once |
| since | so that | than | that |
| though | till | unless | until |
| when | wherever | whereas | whenever |
| where | while | after | although |

Activity 3

**Write three sentences containing subordinating conjunctions.**

1. …………………………………………………………………………………………..

2. …………………………………………………………………………………………..

3. …………………………………………………………………………………………..