

Correlative conjunctions

Correlative conjunctions are pairs such as neither . . . nor, not . . . only, and but . . . also. These conjunctions connect two balanced clauses, phrases, or words.

The two elements that correlative conjunctions connect are usually similar in length and grammatical structure.

There are many examples of correlative conjunctions; some are used more frequently than others, but here is list of the most common pairs:

- Both / and
- Either / or
- Hardly / when
- If / then
- Just as / so
- Neither / nor
- Not only / but also
- Rather / or
- Whether / or

Of this list, the most common by far are:

- Either / or
- Neither / nor
- Not only / but also

When working with correlative conjunctions, there are **three important rules** to remember:

• **ENSURE VERB AGREEMENT**

When using correlative conjunctions, the subject-verb agreement is very important for the sentence to make sense.

- When correlative conjunctions join sentences with two singular subjects, the verb used must also be singular. Example: Neither Ravi nor his brother is coming with us. However, when we use the correlative conjunction pair both..and, we can use a plural verb form.
- When correlative conjunctions join sentences with two plural subjects, the verb used must be a plural one. Example: Neither the students nor the teachers were present at the candlelight march.
- When correlative conjunctions join sentences with one singular and one plural subject, the verb used must agree to the noun or subject it is placed closest to in the sentence. Example: Neither my husband nor my kids like reading books. (The verb 'like' is plural and is used because it is closest to the noun 'kids' which is also plural)

• **ENSURE PRONOUN AGREEMENT**

Pronoun agreement is also important while using correlative conjunctions. The rules with pronouns are very similar to those of subject-verb agreement.

- When correlative conjunctions join sentences with two singular nouns or subjects, the pronoun used must be singular.
 - Example: Neither Reema nor her sister bought her costume.
- When correlative conjunctions join sentences with two plural nouns or subjects, the pronoun used must be plural.
 - Example: Neither the students nor the teachers gave in their consent for the new schedule
- When correlative conjunctions join sentences with one singular and one plural noun or subject, the pronoun must be singular/ plural based on the noun closest to it.
 - Example: Neither Radha nor her friends liked their new piano teacher.

• **ENSURE PARALLEL STRUCTURE.**

When using correlative conjunctions, it is important that the items or ideas being connected follow the same grammatical structure – they have equal functions in the sentence. This is called parallel structure. Parallel structure adds clarity to your writing, making it easier to follow.

- Not Parallel:

My brother not only likes to play video games, but also watch movies.

This example is not parallel because the first conjunction in the pair is followed by a verb, while the second conjunction is followed by a prepositional phrase.

- Parallel:

My brother not only likes to play video games, but he also likes to watch movies.

This example is parallel because both conjunctions are followed by a verb. Separating the conjunction but also to include the subject he is an acceptable way to use this conjunction.

EXTRA TIPS

Do not use commas with Correlative Conjunctions unless there is an independent clause included with the second half of the correlative conjunction.

Since correlative conjunctions are used to connect parts of a sentence with equal value, we only need to use a comma when two independent clauses are being connected with correlative conjunctions.

For Example:

- My brother likes not only to play video games but also to watch movies.

In this example, the correlative conjunctions are connecting two prepositional phrases, so we would not use a comma.

- My brother not only likes to play video games, but he also likes to watch movies.

In the second example, the sentence was adjusted, along with the correlative conjunctions, to create two independent clauses.

In this case, we follow the comma rules for connecting independent clauses and place a comma before the second part of the correlative conjunction.

Avoid a double negative when using Neither/Nor

The double negative is a common mistake in writing, and the use of correlative conjunctions neither/nor is when you need to be on the lookout for a double negative.

- Double Negative Example
 - He did not like neither the movie nor the book.

By using a negative verb (did not like), the negative correlative conjunctions neither/nor create a conflict in the meaning of the sentence.

The above example is a very complicated way of saying he liked the movie and the book, which is probably not what the writer intended.

- **Correcting the Double Negative**

- He liked neither the movie nor the book. Here, the meaning of the sentence is much more clear.

The positive verb liked allows the correlative conjunctions neither/nor to produce the intended meaning. He disliked the movie and the book.

- He did not like either the movie or the book.

The other option for making this sentence clear is to leave the negative verb but switch out the negative correlative conjunctions with either/or. This will give the same intended meaning – he disliked the movie and the book.

Correlative conjunctions functions

- **BOTH ... AND**

We use both ... and when we want to put emphasis on two elements that are true in a sentence. We could also use the coordinating conjunction and, but it doesn't achieve the same emphatic effect. Example:

- "This house is large and cozy."
- "This house is both large and cozy."
- "She cleaned her room and washed the dishes."
- "She both cleaned her room and washed the dishes."
- "My mother and father are bookworms."
- "Both my mother and my father are bookworms."

In the above examples, the sentences using both ... and are more emphatic. Note, however, that the both ... and construction doesn't join independent clauses, only words or phrases.

- **EITHER ... OR**

We use either ... or to present two options. Again, it emphasizes the fact that the choice is limited to only the two given options.

For example:

- "I want to paint the house either white or green."
- "Let's either go swimming or go shopping."
- "Either your father will pick you up, or you'll get a ride home with a friend."

- **NOT ... BUT**

We use not ... but to express a contradiction, negating the first option while emphasizing the second.

For example:

- "He's not happy but thrilled!"
- "She did not like but loved her new earrings."
- "Not just one friend turned up to help, but the entire team arrived."

• NEITHER ... NOR

We use neither ... nor to negate two options.

For example:

- "I have neither the time nor the patience for silly TV programs." (I don't have time, and I don't have patience.)
- "Neither James nor Mike enjoys playing basketball." (James and Mike both do not enjoy playing basketball.)
- "Neither does he understand, nor does he care." (He doesn't understand, and he doesn't care.)

Note that when neither and nor begin two independent clauses, we must use negative inversion (the reversal of the subject and auxiliary verb) for each, as in the third example.

• NOT ONLY ... BUT ALSO

We use not only ... but also to emphasize an additional element in the sentence, especially when its occurrence seems contradictory or surprising in light of what we already know.

For example:

- "This house is not only large but also cozy." (The speaker believes that large houses are not usually cozy.)
- "She not only cleaned her room, but she also washed the dishes." (The speaker is surprised that she did both chores.)
- "Not only is she an award-winning singer, but she also runs track." (The speaker is impressed that she is able to do these two unrelated activities.)

Note that when not only is used to introduce an independent clause, as in the third example, we must use negative inversion (like with neither ... nor). When but begins the second independent clause, the subject comes between it and also.

• JUST AS ... SO

We use just as ... so to indicate that the two elements being joined are similar. Usually, just as begins an independent clause, and so is followed by a second independent clause. Traditionally, the clause after so should be inverted, as in:

- "Just as I love films, so does my brother love sports."
- "Just as Americans love baseball, so do Europeans love soccer."
- "Just as French is spoken in France, so is English spoken in England."

However, it's also common (especially in informal writing and speech) for this structure to occur without inversion, as in:

- "Just as I love films, so my brother loves sports."
- "Just as Americans love baseball, so Europeans love soccer."
- "Just as French is spoken in France, so English is spoken in England."

• WHETHER ... OR

We use whether ... or to express doubt between two possible options. Whether has the same meaning as if in this regard. For example:

- "I don't know whether the white paint or the green paint is better."
- "He's not sure whether he'll be able to attend the game or not."

"We also use whether ... or to indicate that something will happen no matter which choice is made. For example:

- "Whether we stay home and eat a pizza, or we go out and watch a film, I'm sure we'll have a good time."
- "I'm going to help you whether you like it or not."