Conjunctions and Transitions (Part I)

What holds your sentences together?

Think of conjunctions like the mortar between bricks. Mortar holds the bricks together, just like conjunctions hold pieces of your sentence together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I was angry yesterday</th>
<th>I came to school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>it was closed</td>
<td>it was closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there was no electricity</td>
<td>there was no electricity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had to go home.</td>
<td>I had to go home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see in the above illustration, if we don’t use conjunctions to “glue” our sentences together, they may fall apart. Groups of words or ideas that are placed together without conjunctions make writing hard to follow and cause weakness in the writing. Of course we have to understand what they are and how to use them properly, so that our writing is strong and useful to our readers.

Conjunctions not only stop our sentences from being weak, they also give our writing more meaning and let our sentences flow easily. See the lesson below to understand how and when to use them.
What are conjunctions?

Conjunctions are like glue words. They link words or groups of words together. For example:

Linking words together:  
- He likes Malaysia and Singapore. (links nouns)  
- She sings and dances. (links verbs)  
- We are tired and hungry. (links adjectives)  
- They are in China and near Japan. (links phrases)

Linking sentences together:  
- I was tired, so I went home (links clauses)

*Note:* A clause is usually a complete sentence with a subject and verb.  
I was tired + I went home = I was tired, so I went home.  
S V S V  

These two are sentences on their own (each has a subject and a verb), so when we put them together we need some glue – the conjunction ‘so’.

There are three types of conjunctions:  
1. COORDINATING  
2. CORRELATIVE  
3. SUBORDINATING

It’s not so important to remember their names, but to remember to use them well.

1. **Coordinating Conjunctions.** They coordinate or link equal things.

There are only 7 of these. They are:  
1. For (similar to because)  
2. And  
3. Nor (means ‘also not’ – like ‘or’ but negative)  
4. But  
5. Or  
6. Yet (means although or but)  
7. So (gives us the result of something)

Remember this word FANBOYS to help you remember the words. These conjunctions always link similar things like in the examples at the top of this page. They link two verbs, or two nouns, two clauses, etc. What equal elements are being joined in the examples below?

Examples:

1. *He never took his wife shopping*, for he hated to see her spend money.  
2. He wanted to practice painting and sculpture.  
3. She didn’t want to write nor to draw.  
4. *He loved science*, but he didn’t want to study it.  
5. I couldn’t decide if I wanted rice or noodles.  
6. *He loved books*, yet he refused to go to libraries.  
7. The students wanted to work in the lab, so they asked for the keys.
2. **Correlative Conjunctions.** These have two sets of words and link two parts of a sentence. Here are seven common correlative conjunctions:

1. either…or
2. neither….nor
3. not only….but also
4. both….and
5. just as….so too
6. whether….or
7. as….as

There should be a similar kind of structure after each one (like the equal elements mentioned above in Coordinating Conjunctions). What equal elements are being joined in the examples below?

1. In any race, you will **either** win **or** lose.
2. I will **neither** steal money **nor** tell lies.
3. **Not only** did they miss their flight, **but** they also lost their luggage.
4. **Both** Singaporeans **and** Malaysians love to eat durian.
5. **Just as** Michael Jackson was a great musical artist, **so too** was Mozart hundreds of years before.
6. I don’t know **whether** I should become a singer **or** a dancer.
7. She exercises **as** much **as** her sister does (exercises).

3. **Subordinating Conjunctions.** They link together two sets of clauses (**not** nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. like with coordinating or correlative conjunctions).

There are many subordinating conjunctions and they can be divided into different kinds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time/Place:</th>
<th>Opposite meaning:</th>
<th>Result:</th>
<th>Hypothetical:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Although</td>
<td>Because</td>
<td>If</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After</td>
<td>Though</td>
<td>Since</td>
<td>Unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While</td>
<td>While</td>
<td>Now that</td>
<td>Whether (or not)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When</td>
<td>Whereas</td>
<td>As</td>
<td>In case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whenever</td>
<td>Despite (the fact that)</td>
<td>So</td>
<td>As long as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since</td>
<td></td>
<td>In order that</td>
<td>As if/though</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Until</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In so far as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wherever</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whatever</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provided (that)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whoever</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Providing (that)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As far as</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As soon as</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note* that some of the conjunctions in this list can also function in different ways. For example, “before” can be an adverb (I had never seen him before). “Since” can be a preposition (I have known him since May). For this lesson, the above words all function as conjunctions.
Subordinating conjunctions can come between two clauses or at the beginning of the sentence (with a comma between the two clauses). Note the clauses that are linked (and the word order) the examples below:

1. *I was happy before I left my hometown.*
   OR
   *Before I left my hometown, I was happy.*

2. *We went to the beach although it was raining.*
   OR
   *Although it was raining, we went to the beach.*

3. *I couldn’t go to the cinema because I didn’t have any money.*
   OR
   *Because I didn’t have any money, I couldn’t go to the cinema.*

4. *I will teach your French if you teach me Chinese.*
   OR
   *If you teach me Chinese, I will teach you French.*

**EXERCISE**

In the following passage, there are some conjunctions missing. Put in conjunctions where necessary and correct the sentences.

I was walking home one evening, I saw a light on at my friends house, I went in. I knocked on the door nobody answered, I knew the family well, I knew I could go in. I heard my friend’s mother talking on the phone, I didn’t want to disturb her, I could see nobody else was at home. I left. I saw my friend an hour later. I told him I was at his house – I heard his mother talking on the phone. He said it was impossible. She was not at home an hour before. She was in the hospital 400 km away. I see another light, I won’t go in.

**Answer Key**

As I was walking home one evening, I saw a light on at my friends house, *so* I went in. I knocked on the door, *but* nobody answered. I knew the family well, *so* I knew I could go in. I heard my friend’s mother talking on the phone, *but* I didn’t want to disturb her, *and* I could see nobody else was at home, *so* I left. *When* I saw my friend an hour later. I told him I was at his house *and* I heard his mother talking on the phone. He said it was impossible. *Not only* was she not at home an hour before, *but* she was *also* in the hospital 400 km away. *If* I see another light, I won’t go in.
PART II Transitions

Many people confuse conjunctions and transitions. Here are some transitions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finally</th>
<th>Incidentally</th>
<th>Firstly</th>
<th>Ultimately</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nevertheless</td>
<td>Furthermore</td>
<td>In conclusion</td>
<td>Besides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreover</td>
<td>In fact</td>
<td>Besides</td>
<td>Foremost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>However</td>
<td>On the other hand</td>
<td>Indeed</td>
<td>For example</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adding the beauty when the building is done.

Transitions, like conjunctions, are like glue in your writing. Conjunctions are like grammar glue – you have to have the bricks held together with something. Transitions are like the parts of the building that make it beautiful. When the building is constructed you need colour, form, line and shape to flow beautifully. You need that in your writing too. Now that you have held the bricks together it is time to think about how to make your language flow smoothly and to help your reader understand well all the ideas you want to discuss.

So, a transition is simply a change or a movement. It signals movement in your writing to an idea, an example, something opposite, etc. It’s like a light for your reader to help make the ideas blend together into one work. So decorate your writing with transitions and see it come to life.

Transitions help us to link ideas together, but they cannot link sentences. This is one reason that people confuse them. Look at the examples below:

1. Art is present everywhere we look. For example, on every package we buy you can see some design.
2. Many people say that music is a very individual and personal experience. On the other hand, some musicians draw huge crowds of people who enjoy the experience together.
3. Cooking is an experience for all of the senses. Moreover, it is experienced with the eyes, as well as with the mouth.
4. It is important for people around the world to understand mathematics. Indeed, without math, we would not know so much about the universe.

You can see in the examples above that for example, on the other hand, moreover and indeed help us to link ideas together or to make transitions from one idea to the other, but grammatically they cannot link sentences together (to make one longer sentence). Don’t worry, with transitions your writing will also be much better, even more beautiful, but just remember not to use them in place of conjunctions.
Below is a list of transitions that you can use for various purposes in your writing. There are many more than the ones you see here. You can easily find lists with dozens of transition words in each category.

**To show the flow of ideas:**

First (firstly), Second(ly), Third(ly)
First of all, to begin, next, in the first (second) place

**To add more information:**

In addition, additionally, besides, moreover, to add, furthermore, also, in fact, similarly, in the same way

**To give examples:**

For example, for instance, as you can see, in other words, to illustrate, not only that, take for instance

**To show time:**

Finally, at last, previously, subsequently, further, simultaneously, at the same time, eventually, in the meantime

**To show something similar:**

Similarly, by the same token, likewise, in a similar way, just as we have seen, equally, in comparison

**To show something different or opposite:**

On the other hand, on the contrary, however, from another perspective, conversely, in contrast

**To show that you agree with some of the opposite opinion:**

Even though, of course, yet, still,

**To show result or consequence:**

As a result, consequently, because of this, therefore, so, hence, accordingly, fortunately, unfortunately

**To show strength or impact:**

Ultimately, above all, undoubtedly, without doubt, it is perfectly clear, to emphasize,

**To show reason:**

For this reason, so, for this purpose, to account for this, to explain,

**To finish:**

In conclusion, as you can see, in the end, finally, to conclude, in summary, all things considered

There are many more transitions than the ones you see here. As you learn to use them effectively, add them to your vocabulary and build up your stock of transition words.
EXERCISES

1. In this passage there are a number of transitions. Identify them and say what purpose they have in the passage.

   **Graffiti as Art**

   Many people believe that graffiti is the work of gang members and criminals who only want to destroy the way a nice city looks. However, I tend to feel a little different. I believe that graffiti is an art form and that we should give it more value. Recently, the work of graffiti artists has increased highly and it is no longer spray paint vandalism. For instance, the art on the streets of cities like New York and Los Angeles gives us some insight into the lives and cultures of those who live there, through graffiti. Furthermore, many of the images are filled with artistic intention. For instance, there is symbolism, creativity and real technique. Ultimately this too is an art form! From another perspective, I understand that nobody has the right to paint anything on a surface that belongs to someone else, but the fact remains, graffiti is an art form with value and a message. In the end, we should recognize this fact and take it into galleries next to the works of more respected artists.

2. The following passage needs some transitions. Put in transitions and say what purpose they have in the passage.

   **An End to Graffiti**

   Today it seems that young people in many countries feel they can take a can of spray paint and destroy. They write up buildings. They make pictures. They send scary gang messages on public buildings. They have many problems in the area where they live. That is not the fault of other citizens who have to endure this. It makes the city look dirty too. Nobody wants to see their beautiful city become a junk yard of paint cans. We should get rid of it completely! Other countries are battling this very problem. They have to deal with graffiti using the law. We should have laws that protect our buildings. We need to stop letting kids think this is art. We can then have our nice streets back.
Graffiti as Art

Many people believe that graffiti is the work of gang members and criminals who only want to destroy the way a nice city looks. However, I tend to feel a little different. I believe that graffiti is an art form and that we should give it more value. Recently, the work of graffiti artists has increased highly and it is no longer spray paint vandalism. For instance, the art on the streets of cities like New York and Los Angeles gives us some insight into the lives and cultures of those who live there, through graffiti. Furthermore, many of the images are filled with artistic intention. For example, there is symbolism, creativity and real technique. Ultimately, this too is an art form! From another perspective, I understand that nobody has the right to paint anything on a surface that belongs to someone else, but the fact remains, graffiti is an art form with value and a message. In the end, we should recognize this fact and take it into galleries next to the works of more respected artists.

An End to Graffiti

Today it seems that young people in many countries feel they can take a can of spray paint and destroy. For example, they write up buildings and even make pictures. Moreover, they send scary gang messages on public buildings. Of course, they have many problems in the area where they live. However, that is not the fault of other citizens who have to endure this. Additionally, it makes the city look dirty. Nobody wants to see their beautiful city become a junk yard of paint cans. Ultimately, we should get rid of it completely! Similarly, other countries are battling this very problem. They have to deal with graffiti using the law. By the same token, we should have laws that protect our buildings. Without doubt, we need to stop letting kids think this is art. Then we can then have our nice streets back.