

How to use Commas with Compound Sentences

and Coordinating Conjunctions!

Hmm. Comma . . . or no comma?
Ask yourself these key questions:

1. Is there a coordinating conjunction?

Here are your coordinating conjunctions:

But
Or
Yet
For
And
Nor
So *



Think "BOYFANS."

2. Is the coordinating conjunction connecting two independent clauses?

Jason looked in the mirror but could not see himself.

➔ NO! The words "could not see himself" are not an independent clause. They can't stand alone. The coordinating conjunction is connecting two actions (verbs): "looked" and "could not see."

Jason looked in the mirror but he could not see himself.

➔ YES! "Jason looked in the mirror" is an independent clause. So is "he could not see himself." The coordinating conjunction "but" is connecting two independent clauses.

3. Are the answers to #s 1 and 2 "yes"?

Then insert a comma BEFORE the coordinating conjunction.

Jason looked in the mirror , but he could not see himself.

Independent Clause

Comma BEFORE Coordinating Conjunction

Independent Clause

4. Exception: Can you silently say "so that" instead of "so"?

If you can, then "so" is not a coordinating conjunction. No comma is needed.

Jason looked in the mirror so he could enjoy the view.

Silent "that."

➔ Another pesky exception: If the two independent clauses are short and parallel in construction, no comma is needed. Example: The rain fell and the wind blew.

➔ Yet another exception: If the two independent clauses are imperatives and closely related, no comma is needed. Example: Buckle up and hold on!

I HATE grammar exceptions!

* Notice that "because" is not on this list. It is not a coordinating conjunction. Unless you absolutely need a comma for clarity, do not insert one before the word "because."

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