

SAMPLE: Let's Eat Fifi, Lesson 3



Commas

Lesson 3: Commas and Compound Sentences

Commas are beastly things, and it's easy to make mistakes. This tutorial will help you make fewer comma mistakes when you are dealing with compound sentences.

A compound sentence is made of two independent clauses. An *independent clause* has a subject and a verb (or subject and predicate) and can stand alone as a complete sentence. Comma mistakes in compound sentences are rampant.

The infographic on the next page shows you what **compound sentences** are, what **coordinating conjunctions** are, and where the comma goes in a sentence of this sort. It also explains the exceptions. Before we go any further, here are some important terms and examples.

An **independent** clause, one that can stand alone as a sentence:

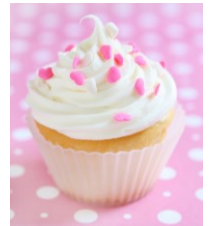
Jesse hates to do homework.

A **dependent** clause, one that cannot stand alone (This one is missing a subject):

Which is not good.

A **compound verb**—often mistaken for a compound sentence:

Olivia bakes cupcakes and takes them to youth group every week.



You cannot make a complete sentence out of the second half of the sentence: “and takes them to youth group every week.” Therefore, it is *not* two independent clauses joined together to make a compound sentence. It is a sentence with a coordinating conjunction (*and*) that joins two verbs (*bakes* and *takes*).

A **compound sentence** with a *coordinating* conjunction (*and*):

Olivia bakes cupcakes, and she takes them to youth group every week.

A sentence with a *subordinating* conjunction (in this case, *because*)—which does not get a comma:

Olivia bakes cupcakes because she takes them to youth group every week.

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This infographic
will walk you through
the comma and
compound sentence maze.

For a full-size PDF of the
infographic, [click here](#).

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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SAMPLE: Let's Eat Fifi, Lesson 3



Exercise 3

In numbers 1-7, write the coordinating conjunctions you learned from the infographic.

In numbers 8-20, read each sentence carefully and find the conjunction. If it is a true compound sentence with a coordinating conjunction, place the comma correctly. If it is not a compound sentence, leave the comma out.

Use carets to insert commas where needed. Each correct answer below is worth 5 points.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
8. I love to play the tuba and will enter the Oompah Contest next week.
9. Seymour fed the dogs but he forgot to tell his mom.
10. Doctors study ethics for they make many life-and-death decisions every day.
11. Jason doesn't know if he will write a letter of complaint to the NFL about the godaddy.com commercials or simply e-mail a short note.
12. He fixed a peanut butter sandwich for me so I wouldn't faint during my comma quiz.
13. The costume designer shopped all day yet did not find the right material for Anna's and Elsa's dresses.
14. Jeremy loves to read *The Three Musketeers* but he refuses to watch the movies.
15. Johnny Depp bought a private island for his family in 2004 because he wanted them to have a safe haven.
16. I quit gardening for I couldn't stand the worms and fat grubs.
17. I quit gardening because I couldn't stand the worms and fat grubs.
18. The soles on my new sneakers are flapping so I bought a new pair.

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19. Write your essay this week and hand it in by Friday.

20. *Castaway* uses no music while the main character Chuck Noland is deserted on the island and I didn't even notice!

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Answers

Exercise 3

In numbers 1-7, write the coordinating conjunctions.

In numbers 8-20, read each sentence carefully and find the conjunction. If it is a true compound sentence with a coordinating conjunction, place the comma correctly. If it is not a compound sentence, leave the comma out.

Use carets to insert commas where needed. Each correct answer below is worth 5 points.

1. But

2. Or

3. Yet

4. For

5. And

6. Nor

7. So

8. I love to play the tuba and will enter the Oompah Contest next week. *No comma needed.*

"And" is joining two verbs ("play" and "will enter").

9. Seymour fed the dogs, but he forgot to tell his mom.

10. Doctors study ethics, for they make many life-and-death decisions every day.

11. Jason doesn't know if he will write a letter of complaint to the NFL about the godaddy.com commercials or simply e-mail a short note. *No comma needed. "Or" is joining two predicates ("will write" and "e-mail").*

12. He fixed a peanut butter sandwich for me so I wouldn't faint during my comma quiz. *No comma needed. A silent "that" can be added after "so." This is mentioned as one of the exceptions in the infographic but will be emphasized more in the next lesson.*

13. The costume designer shopped all day yet did not find the right material for Anna's and Elsa's dresses. *No comma needed. "Yet" is joining two predicates ("shopped" and "did not find").*

14. Jeremy loves to read *The Three Musketeers*, but he refuses to watch the movies.

SAMPLE: Let's Eat Fifi, Lesson 3



15. Johnny Depp bought a private island for his family in 2004 because he wanted them to have a safe haven. *No comma needed. "Because" is not a coordinating conjunction; it is a subordinating conjunction.*

16. I quit gardening, for I couldn't stand the worms and fat grubs.

17. I quit gardening because I couldn't stand the worms and fat grubs. *No comma needed. "Because" is not a coordinating conjunction.*

18. The soles on my new sneakers are flapping, so I bought a new pair.

19. Write your essay this week and hand it in by Friday. *No comma needed. In this imperative sentence, the coordinating conjunction "and" is joining two verbs ("write" and "hand").*

20. *Castaway* uses no music while the main character Chuck Noland is deserted on the island, and I didn't even notice!