

As or like

Introduction



He works **as** a chef in a big hotel, just **like** his father.

Definition

'As' and 'like' are both prepositions and conjunctions.

Uses

As

Use	Examples
Comparisons	January is as cold as February. The ocean in Florida is as warm as a swimming pool. [See Comparative adjectives]
Presented as something/ someone else	All the children at the party were dressed as cowboys. The spy camera was disguised as a book.
To talk about a job or a function	He works as an ecologist in the Tundra. I had to use a knife as a screwdriver because I had no tools with me.
In the role of...	As your friend, I advise you not to take that job. Dr Mugwort was speaking as an expert on the subject.
In the same way or manner	John was late for the meeting, as usual. The letter 'K' before 'N', as in 'knife, isn't pronounced.
To state a reason	As I didn't attend the meeting, I asked Susan to give me the minutes. Mr Masomoto will need a translator as he doesn't speak English.

To mean 'while'	<p>He was painting the walls as I was sanding the door.</p> <p>He became more confident as he learned more about the job.</p>
To mean 'although'	<p>Try as she might, she couldn't convince him to change his working practice. [although she tried hard]</p> <p>Confident as he was, he didn't manage to secure the contract. [although he was confident]</p>

Like

Use	Examples
Physical similarity	<p>She looks like her mother.</p> <p>This cocktail tastes like tropical fruit.</p>
In a certain way	<p>Jonathon swims like a fish.</p> <p>Why are you looking at me like that?</p>
To say something is normal or usual	<p>It's just like John to be late for the presentation.</p> <p>That was so like her, telling everyone about it before the contract was signed</p>
To mean 'for example'	<p>I prefer more classical music like Beethoven or Tchaikovsky.</p> <p>Arabian customers prefer natural fibres like silk or wool.</p>
Similar to, or in a similar way	<p>Like your friend Susan, I also think that you shouldn't take that job.</p> <p>He found getting a job in the city was very difficult, like many young people.</p>

Both 'as' and 'like'

Use	Examples
To mean 'in the manner'	<p>Like/as I said, you can always phone me if you need some advice.</p> <p>The meeting with the Swedish didn't go like/as he'd planned.</p>

Some verbs typically followed by 'as' or 'like'

Verbs followed by 'like'	
Feel	Your team feel like you don't appreciate them if you don't give them praise when it's due.

Look	If looks like it's going to rain again.
Seem	You don't seem like yourself today, are you feeling OK?
Sound	I hear Joe and Peter talking in the hall it sounded like an argument.
Smell	The house smelt like someone had been baking bread.
Taste	Amy's shortbread tasted like strawberries.

Verbs followed by object + 'as'	
Accept	The department found it difficult to accept Mark as their new manager.
Characterise	John characterised the move to a bigger building as the company's turning point.
Class	I'd class this wine as a Grand Cru.
Count	Bank holidays aren't counted as annual leave.
Define	Our intranet can be defined as a private network which uses the world wide web.
Describe	The journalist described the scene as one of the worst of the current conflict.
Express	Can you express 33 as a percentage of 150?
Interpret	James interpreted his colleagues silence as shyness.
Know	Paris is known as the most romantic city in the world.
Look on	Today we look on a refrigerator as essential in our homes.
Use	Don't use a knife as a screwdriver.
Regard	To be regarded as serious applicant your CV must be perfect.
Refer	The author referred to several academics as the source of his information.
Recognise	He was recognised as one of the greatest artists of the period.
See	Learning a new language is seen by many as vital in this period of globalisation.
Treat	Lydia treated her new husband's children as her own.
Think of	In western countries we think of clean water as a basic human right.

Using 'like' as a conjunction

Some people and older grammar books state that it is incorrect to use 'like' as a conjunction but it has been common in everyday, informal situations for a long time. Both of these are correct:

Our new Sodasport is light, and refreshes **like** a sports drink should.

Our new Sodasport is light, and refreshes **as** a sports drink should.

'As if' and 'as though'

These are conjunctions which we use to make comparisons. They have the same meaning and are used to talk about situations that are imaginary, possible or likely. They are often used with verbs like 'look', 'feel', 'sound', 'seem' etc.

The meeting was so boring - it felt **as if** it would never end.

It looks **as though** we'll have to work late again tonight.

It sounds **as if** it's raining out there.

I don't know why she isn't speaking to me; it's not **as though** I've done anything wrong.

In the examples above, we can also use 'like', although this is considered conversational and is best avoided in formal contexts.

We can also use these before an infinitive or a prepositional phrase. In these kinds of sentences, we can't use 'like':

He looked at me across the table **as if to say**, 'Please don't disagree with the client!'
I was embarrassed by them. They were behaving **as though at school**.

Choosing between 'as' and 'like'

Meaning

In the tables above you can see that sometimes the choice of word changes the meaning.

He works **as** an ecologist.

[This is his job.]

He works **like** an ecologist does.

[His job is similar to that of an ecologist.]

As your mother, I promise I'll always be here for you.

[The speaker is the listener's mother.]

Like your mother, I promise I'll always be here for you.

[The speaker is making the same promise as the listener's mother did.]

Formality

If both words have the same meaning, then consider the formality. 'As' is sometimes more formal than 'like'.

It was **as though** she wanted to lose the debate.

It was **like** she wanted to lose the debate. [informal, conversational]

Idioms and expressions with 'as' and 'like'

This isn't my ideal job but I might/may as well stay here till I find something better.
[easiest or most logical action]

She loves her new dog; it's her baby, as it were. [the speaker gives their impression]

My office needs to be totally redecorated and as for the air conditioning, I need to call in a technician. [to introduce someone or something into a conversation]

He works like a dog to earn enough money for his studies. [works really hard]

What is she like? She's put her socks in the fridge again! [Informal, conversational in British English when someone does something annoying, silly etc.]

John said the car was worth \$20,000; more like \$2,000 with all the bumps he's had.
[giving more accurate information]

There's nothing like a Sodasport after a good workout. [to praise something]

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