Conjunctions and paired conjunctions

Introduction

As I have a lot of work to do before the summer holidays, I don't have time to attend the seminar and neither do my colleagues.

Definition

These words have different meanings and uses but they can all be used as conjunctions.

Uses

Conjunction	Use	Examples
as, since, for	To mean 'because'	We decided to work late as we're so busy at the moment. I'll go to the seminar as well since you're going. She was very excited, for this was the first day of her holiday. [see note below]
yet	To mean 'but' - often to emphasise something that's surprising	I was really tired, yet I managed to stay awake until the end of the film.
nor, neither	To connect two negative ideas	I'm not happy about it and neither/nor is Sébastien.

so	**To connect two positive ideas [See 'so' in and, but, or, so, because rule]**	**I'm very happy about it and so is Sébastien.**

Since, as, for

Note that

1. **Since and as have the same meaning as because but they are used in slightly different ways. Because is used when a reason is a more important or necessary part of a sentence in order to answer the question 'why?' The 'because' clause usually comes second:**

I chose to live in the south of England because I wanted to be near my parents.

With since and as, the reason is more evident, less important or already known. The since or as clause is more likely to be placed at the beginning of a sentence:

As we're so busy at the moment, we've decided to work late this week.
Since it's such a nice day, shall we go out?

2. **For is much less common in conversation - it is considered old-fashioned - but we find it in literature:**

He felt ashamed, for he knew it was all his fault.

Yet

Note that

1. **In everyday conversation, we are more likely to use common words and expressions with a similar meaning such as 'but'.**

2. **We sometimes use yet in short phrases with two adjectives:**

This device is simple yet effective.
Our boss is strict yet fair.

Neither, nor, so

Note that these are also often used as responses to say that a situation is the same as that of another person. Here are some examples:

'to be'	Auxiliary verbs	Other verbs
"I'm hungry." "So am I." ["Me too."]	"Carine should be on the team." "So should Armelle."	"I love chocolate." "So do I." ["Me too."]
"Philippe was late." "So was Bertrand."	"I've read this book." "So have I." ["Me too."]	"David went to the exhibition." "So did Keira."
"I'm not sure." "Neither/nor am I." ["Me neither."/"Nor me."]	"I can't help her with that." "Neither/nor can I." ["Me neither."/"Nor me."]	"He doesn't want to go out to lunch." "Neither/nor do we."
"I wasn't working on that project last year." "Neither/nor was I." ["Me neither."/"Nor me."]	"This computer mustn't be used today." "Neither/nor must this one."	"I don't understand this." "Neither/nor do I." ["Me neither."/"Nor me."]

Note that we can say "Me too" when agreeing with a positive statement.
We can also say "Me neither" or "Nor me" when agreeing with a negative statement.

Examples

As we all have other work to do, let's stop now and carry on tomorrow.

Since I live in a city, I'm used to a lot of traffic and noise.

He was nervous yet excited.

I'm afraid there's no more pork. Neither do we have fish on the menu today.

Arnaud made a speech at the wedding and so did his father.

Paired conjunctions

This meal is not only tasty but also nutritious.

We use them to connect two ideas including nouns, verbs, adjectives or phrases.
Examples:

I invited	**both**	**Brenda**	**and**	**Angela**	**to the seminar.**
	Both	**Brenda**	**and**	**Angela**	**are going to the seminar.**
It's available in	**either**	**red**	**or**	**blue.**	
I don't know	**whether**	**to fix it**	**or**	**buy a new one.**	

Conjunctions	Use	Examples
both...and	**To emphasise that there are two things**	**Both a knowledge of languages and IT skills are necessary for this job.** **I like both red and white wine - I don't have a preference.**

either...or	**To talk about a possible consequence** **To talk about two alternatives or possibilities.**	**Either we make a decision today or we risk losing the contract.** **We can have the meeting either tomorrow or Friday.**
neither...nor	**To emphasise two things in a negative sentence**	**I like neither tea nor coffee - I prefer cold drinks.** **Neither my brother nor my sister live in England - they both moved to the US after university.**
not...but	**To emphasise a contrast between two things - sometimes in order to make a correction** **Note that this structure is most often used with the verb 'to be'**	**It wasn't Anne who wanted to speak to you but Jodi.** **It isn't blue pens that we need but red.**
not only...but also	**To emphasise that there are two things - it can express surprise or annoyance**	**Not only is he good-looking but he can also cook!** **It's not only cheap but also practical.**
whether...or	**To talk about two alternatives** **Note that these two words can be placed separately or together**	**He isn't sure whether it's better to fly or go by train.** **Whether or not you agree, we're going to sign the contract.**

Subject-verb agreement

With either...or and neither...nor, the choice of verb depends on whether the first or second person or thing mentioned is singular or plural.

When the second noun is singular, a singular verb is preferred but plural verbs are acceptable in conversation.	**Either the sales manager or the director is going to attend the conference.**

When the second noun is plural, use a plural verb.	**Neither the director nor the sales managers are going to attend the conference.**
When the second noun is singular but the first is plural, you can use a singular or plural verb.	**Either the sales managers or the director is/are going to attend the conference.**

Note that when either is not at the beginning of a sentence or clause, we can omit it:

It's available in (either) red or blue.
We can have the meeting (either) tomorrow or Friday.

Not only...but also

Note that

1. **We can separate but and also - they don't have to be together in the sentence:**

   She's not only creative but also good at solving problems.
   Or
   She's not only creative but she's also good at solving problems.

2. **We often invert the not only clause:**

   Not only is she creative but she's also good at solving problems.

3. **We can use 'too' or 'as well' instead of also. These are placed at the end of a sentence:**

   She's not only creative but good at solving problems too/as well.

'Whether' has a similar meaning to 'if' and can sometimes be used as an alternative to 'if' when we talk about two possibilities:

I'm wondering if/whether we should tell him (or not).
It depends if/whether he'll be unhappy about it (or not).
I don't know if/whether recruiting more staff is a good idea or not.
He can't remember if/whether Aurélie or Olivier is in charge of the account.

Whether is preferred to 'if':

a) before an infinitive:

I don't know whether to do this now or later. ✔
I don't know if to do this now or later. ✘

Have you decided whether or not to apply for the job? ✔
Have you decided if to apply for this job? ✘

b) after prepositions such as 'about' or expressions with a similar meaning:

There was a lot of disagreement about whether we should re-locate or not.
It was a question of whether (or not) to choose the cheapest contractor.

c) at the beginning of a sentence:

Whether we eat in or go to a restaurant doesn't matter to me - you can choose.

d) directly before 'or not':

Have you decided whether or not you're coming with us?
Have you decided if/whether you're coming with us or not?

Examples

We've got both meat and veggie burgers - which would you like?

We can either carry on for an hour or stop now and have lunch.

This job is neither challenging nor fun.

Not just one but all four of the children raised their hands.

We're not only going to the mountains but also the sea.

I don't know whether to have chocolate or vanilla.

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