

# Paired conjunctions

## Introduction



This meal is **not only** tasty **but also** nutritious.

## Definition

These are **conjunctions** which we use in pairs.

## Construction

We use them to connect two ideas including nouns, verbs, adjectives or phrases. Here are some examples:

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

# Uses

| Conjunctions<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" /> | Use  | Examples  |
|--|--|---|
| <b>both...and</b>  | To emphasise that there are two things   | <b>Both</b> a knowledge of languages <b>and</b> IT skills are necessary for this job.<br><br>I like <b>both</b> red <b>and</b> white wine - I don't have a preference.                  |
| <b>either...or</b>   | To talk about a possible consequence<br><br>To talk about two alternatives or possibilities.   | <b>Either</b> we make a decision today <b>or</b> we risk losing the contract.<br><br>We can have the meeting <b>either</b> tomorrow <b>or</b> Friday.                                   |
| <b>neither...nor</b>   | To emphasise two things in a negative sentence   | I like <b>neither</b> tea <b>nor</b> coffee - I prefer cold drinks.<br><br><b>Neither</b> my brother <b>nor</b> my sister live in England - they both moved to the US after university. |
| <b>not...but</b>   | To emphasise a contrast between two things - sometimes in order to make a correction<br><br><b>Note that</b> this structure is most often used with the verb 'to be' | It wasn't Anne who wanted to speak to you <b>but</b> Jodi.<br><br>It <b>isn't</b> blue pens that we need <b>but</b> red.  |
| <b>not only...but also</b>   | To emphasise that there are two things - it can express surprise or annoyance  | <b>Not only</b> is he good-looking <b>but</b> he can <b>also</b> cook!<br><br>It's <b>not only</b> cheap <b>but also</b> practical.   |
| <b>whether...or</b>  | To talk about two alternatives<br><br><b>Note that</b> these two words can be placed separately or together  | He isn't sure <b>whether</b> it's better to fly <b>or</b> go by train.<br><br><b>Whether</b> <b>or</b> 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.

## Either...or

**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...or

'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. <?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />



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

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