

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 | 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. | |

Uses

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

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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