

Paired conjunctions

Introduction



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

Definition

We use paired conjunctions to connect two ideas including nouns, verbs, adjectives or phrases.

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.	

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.



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



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