

Transitions: Conjunctive Adverbs

Conjunctive adverbs are transition words or phrases. Conjunctive adverbs are also called connective adverbs or linking adverbs. Even though conjunctive adverbs are conjunctions, they are different from coordinating conjunctions, and they are not used in the same way.

Coordinating conjunctions are *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so* (FANBOYS), which are punctuated with a comma before them when joining two complete sentences. Conjunctive adverbs are used in three ways: to show a function between two independent clauses in a sentence, to show a function between two separate sentences, or to act as an interrupter word or phrase. Common conjunctive adverbs and functions are shown in the table below.

Common Conjunctive Adverbs and Their Functions

Function	Examples			
Cause and Effect	accordingly	consequently	therefore	then
Sequence	first/next	finally	furthermore	in addition
Time	before	meanwhile	since	now
Contrast	however	instead	in spite of	rather
Emphasis	indeed	of course	certainly	definitely
Summarize	in conclusion	in summary	briefly	quickly
Illustrate	for example	for instance	namely	typically
Comparison	like/as	likewise	similarly	alternatively

(Note: This table does not include all conjunctive adverbs.)

Joining Independent Clauses

An independent clause can stand by itself as a complete sentence. To join two independent clauses with a conjunctive adverb, writers often use a semicolon before a conjunctive adverb and then a comma after. It can be helpful to think of the sentence structure as a formula. The basic structure of a conjunctive adverb joining independent clauses is as follows:

Independent clause; *[conjunctive adverb]*, independent clause.

Joining two independent clauses with a conjunctive adverb creates a **compound sentence**.

Examples: I washed my hands; **therefore**, my hands are clean.
We can prevent the spread of disease; **for instance**, we can wash our hands after using the restroom.

In the first example, the conjunctive adverb is “therefore.” It separates the two independent clauses and shows the cause-and-effect function of “I washed my hands” and “my hands are clean.” In the second example, the conjunctive adverb is “for instance.” It separates the two independent clauses and shows the illustrative function: The second clause, “we can wash our hands after using the restroom,” illustrates *how* “we can prevent the spread of disease.”

In both examples, there is an independent clause on both sides of the conjunctive adverb, a semicolon before the conjunctive adverb, and a comma after the conjunctive adverb. Using a conjunctive adverb to connect two independent clauses shows a close relationship between them.

Transitioning at the Beginning of a Sentence

Conjunctive adverbs can appear at the beginning of a sentence followed by a comma. The conjunctive adverb will transition from the following sentence and can show how the following sentence is related to the previous sentence. The basic structure of a conjunctive adverb transitioning at the beginning of a sentence is as follows:

Independent clause. [**Conjunctive adverb**], independent clause.

Examples: Several countries locked down during the pandemic. **Similarly**, other countries did the same.
Few people believed the pandemic was a problem in the beginning. **Now**, they are facing the consequences.

In the first example, the conjunctive adverb is “similarly.” It transitions between sentences by showing the comparison function between several countries and other countries. In the second example, the conjunctive adverb is “now.” It transitions by showing a time function between people’s beliefs in the beginning and the consequences they are currently facing.

Interrupting Word or Phrase

Conjunctive adverbs can appear in the middle of a sentence to add a function to the sentence depending on the context. Conjunctive adverbs as interrupter words are different from conjunctive adverbs joining independent clauses because the placement of the interrupter word is flexible.

Examples: The doctor’s instructions were clear, **for example**, that people should wash their hands after using the restroom.
Some people may forget to wash their hands, **however**, when they are in a rush.

I, **in summary**, was not convinced by his argument

The conjunctive adverb is “for example” in the first sentence. It adds the function of illustration into the sentence by showing the “doctor’s instructions,” which are that “people should wash their hands after using the restroom.” In the second example, the conjunctive adverb is “however.” It adds the function of contrast into the sentence by contrasting why “some people may forget to wash their hands.” The conjunctive adverb is “in summary” in the third example. It adds the function of briefly summarizing the idea in context.

Comma Splice Warning

Conjunctive adverbs are *not* coordinating conjunctions. A conjunctive adverb cannot join two independent clauses with only a single comma; doing so will create a comma splice, which is a punctuation error. A comma splice is created when two independent clauses, or two complete sentences, are incorrectly connected. Comma splices are common punctuation issues, so be sure to proofread for them in your own writing. (You can learn more about the topic in our [Comma Splices and Fused Sentences](#) handout.)

There are two ways to fix comma splices involving conjunctive adverbs.

1. Replace the comma with a semicolon, and place a comma after the conjunctive adverb.

Comma Splice: *The vaccine was created, **in summary** cases of the virus decreased.

Correction: The vaccine was created; **in summary**, cases of the virus decreased.

2. Replace the comma with a period, capitalize the conjunctive adverb, and place a comma after the conjunctive adverb.

Comma Splice: *The population practiced public safety, **finally** normalcy returned.

Correction: The population practiced public safety. **Finally**, normalcy returned.

Activity

Part I

Using the strategies discussed in this handout, insert punctuation into the sentences below. Remember that conjunctive adverbs can be used to transition between independent clauses (complete sentences), or they can interrupt sentences—choose your punctuation accordingly!

1. Sequoyah wanted to eat the whole pie however the pie belonged to Unaduti.
2. Gugulethu rarely goes to the bar typically she goes to the shooting range.
3. Viktor is going to buy a lot of new parts today however that will be sold tomorrow.
4. Tyrone rode his bike to his mother’s house consequently he was drenched from the rain.
5. We should finish the job for example by cleaning the car.

Part II

Replace the functions noted in parentheses with a conjunctive adverb. Make sure to capitalize at the beginning of a new sentence. Refer to the table on page one of this handout for assistance.

6. Gaige created a robot for the science fair. (Time Function), Chell made a potato battery.
7. Mingmei is a quiet person; (Comparison Function), Na'estse does not talk much.
8. Nguyen likes taunting his friends; (Sequence Function), he tries to make them angry.
9. Saanvi was told to take Mi-Young's rock. (Contrast Function), she made sure no one took her rock.
10. Santiago can forget to announce winners, (Contrast Function), during the peak of excitement in the competition.

Part III

Correct the comma splices in the following sentences (and add other punctuation as needed).

11. Prisha saw that Chaitanya was hungry, quickly she hid the candy under the pillow.
12. You sometimes get caught up in our own perspective, for instance you forget people are trying to do their best.
13. I walked into Zhang Wei's workshop, of course he was working on a new project.
14. Rosalina wanted to become a soldier and an astronaut, therefore she signed up for the space force.
15. Morrigan was still angry at Lilith, however Lilith refused to apologize.

Answer Key for Activity

1. Sequoyah wanted to eat the whole pie; however, the pie belonged to Unaduti.
2. Gugulethu rarely goes to the bar. Typically, she goes to the shooting range.
3. Viktor is going to buy a lot of new parts today, however, that will be sold tomorrow.
4. Tyrone rode his bike to his mother's house; consequently, he was drenched from the rain.
5. We should finish the job, for example, by cleaning the car.
6. Gaige created a robotic science project. Meanwhile, Chell made a potato battery.
7. Mingmei is a quiet person; similarly, Na'estse does not talk much.
8. Nguyen likes taunting his friends; in addition, he tries to make them angry.
9. Saanvi was told to take Mi-Young's rock. Instead, she made sure no one took her rock.
10. Santiago can forget to announce winners, however, during the peak of excitement in the competition.
11. Prisha saw that Chaitanya was hungry. Quickly, she hid the candy under the pillow.
12. You sometimes get caught up in our own perspective. For instance, you forget people are trying to do their best.
13. I walked into Zhang Wei's workshop; of course, he was working on a new project.
14. Rosalina wanted to become a soldier and an astronaut; therefore, she signed up for the space force.
15. Morrigan was still angry at Lilith; however, Lilith refused to apologize.

References

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