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THE **THIRD** IN A SERIES OF EXERCISES ON SENTENCE FLUENCY

NEWSWORTHY SENTENCES

BY DAVID PATES

CONJUNCTIONS LINK SIMILARITIES OF DETAILS

COORDINATE CONJUNCTIONS

Stories reported in the press interest readers because the numerous details about people, settings and actions contain information that appears cumulative (a *plus b plus c*) or contrasting (a is x, but b is y). The observations ignite reader interest because the writers use coordinating words, such as **and**, **but**, **nor**, **or**, **yet** and **as well as**, to provide depth and complexity to the story's details. In addition, by using paired phrases, such as **both ... and**, **either ... or**, **neither ... nor**, **not only ... but also**, writers help readers value conjunctions as signals of "paired coordinates" — two combined terms that produce another, larger picture of related details. Obviously, "good reporting" is the attentive observation of the news situation's setting and action.

Writers must master other language structures, such as the correct choice of prepositions and the helpful sequencing of details, to enhance connections. However, they must realize that selecting precise conjunctions merits top priority in editing decisions to produce copy that immediately establishes relationships for readers.

Coordinate conjunctions serve as delicate scales that require constructions of the same weight on each side. Then they show off equal ideas, equal actions or equal descriptions to serve readers.

EXERCISE 1: LINKS FOR EQUAL STRUCTURES

Coordinate conjunctions do not favor only one or two parts of speech. In the blank before each item, identify the italicized grammatical form joined by the underlined coordinating conjunction.

Connecting words

- _____ 1. The *gymnasium* and the *theater* are on the west side of the building.
- _____ 2. The opponent's 6-foot-10-inch center is *brawny* but *awkward*.
- _____ 3. Track teams practice *indoors* and *outdoors*.
- _____ 4. Seniors had a simple choice: *Attend classes* or *fail*.
- _____ 5. Noreen Baxter dances *lightly* and *gracefully*.

Note to teachers: Guide students in determining answers for 1, 6 and 11. Then let them complete the other answers independently.

Connecting phrases

- _____ 6. *Correct spelling* and *careful editing* are trademarks of a responsible publication.
- _____ 7. Ethical newspaper standards forbid both *obscene language* and *libelous statements*.
- _____ 8. Neither *delaying interviews* nor *asking yes-no questions* are productive journalism work habits.
- _____ 9. Publication leaders listen intently *in the hallways* and *in the journalism lab*.
- _____ 10. Editors are suspicious when new reporters claim they are *working hard* but *getting nowhere*.

Connecting clauses

- _____ 11. Important decisions happen either *when the staff brainstorms* or *when the editors finalize pages*.
- _____ 12. Modern magazines employ freelancers *who can write* and *who can photograph*.
- _____ 13. *The reporter claimed he turned in his story on time*, yet *the checklist proved the first draft was one week late*.
- _____ 14. An effective editor promotes *what is innovative* as well as *what is required*.
- _____ 15. Not only *did the journalism students publish a newspaper monthly*, but *they also produced Web site editions daily*.

NEWSWORTHY SENTENCES EXERCISE

EXERCISE 2: POWER IN PAIRS

In the following paragraphs, notice the effect of **and** and **but** when correctly used. Forceful writing and thoughtful editing happen when students pay attention to correct usage of the simple words.

John F. Burns, a *New York Times* Pulitzer Prize reporter, discovered he had a long list of nouns as he developed the story about the man in England whose metal detector located fabulous ancient artifacts going back to the seventh **and** the eighth centuries.

The original text follows as reprinted from the *New York Times* in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* Sept. 25, 2009.

Tentatively identified by some experts as bounty from one of the wars that racked Middle England in the seventh **and** eighth centuries, they included sword pommels **and** dagger hilts, scabbard bosses **and** helmet cheek-pieces, Christian crosses **and** figures of animals, eagles **and** fish.

Note how the writer engages reader interest through a pairing of two objects “coordinated” with a common conjunction, **and**. How many times does he use the word **and** in one sentence? Why does his use of **and** work well? Why is it challenging to use the word **and** correctly? Explain the danger of stringing phrases or clauses together haplessly by simply inserting **and** in a careless manner.

In Burns’ text, emphasize the balanced constructions or images before and after each use of **and**. Identify three constructions:

- “the” + adjective
- Adjective + noun
- Stand-alone noun

Besides depending on a conjunction such as **and** to help organize a sentence with a long list of adjective-prefaced nouns, Burns also employs another common coordinator, **but**, to denote difference or contrast:

Archaeologists initially estimate the value of the trove at 1 million pounds — about \$1.6 million — **but** say it could be many times that.

The coordinate conjunction emphasizes the noteworthy difference between actual value and the original estimate.

COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS: MEANING AND USE

CONJUNCTION	MEANING	EXAMPLE
and	plus (for equal word structures)	Eliot and Alisa are leaving tomorrow
but	contrasts	LeeAnn is friendly, but Jason is taciturn.
or	one or the other of two alternatives is true	They are determined to succeed or to go bankrupt in the process.
nor	joins two negative assertions, both true	Eliot does not give up easily, nor does Alisa
yet	but at the same time (Time element is essential.)	The reporter is fast, yet he delays starting stories.
as well as	additional information that is similar but not equal	The radio station excels in news as well as in music.

NEWSWORTHY SENTENCES EXERCISE

EXERCISE 3: LINKS TO STRENGTHEN COPY

Developing copy: Organize students into small groups of four or five. Assign each group a school-related topic or subject that implicitly contains a variety of categories and associated details. Typical examples may include sports (golf, football, soccer, basketball — types of plays, equipment, rules, etc.), music (vocal, instrumental — styles, periods, audiences, etc.) and/or clubs (purposes, rules, parties, etc.). Ask students to complete two tasks:

1. Assemble lists of noun-based details in these categories.
2. Compose effective, complete journalistic sentences demonstrating the function of conjunctions in communicating details.

For advanced editing skills, expand the exercise to coordinate adjectives, verbs and other parts of speech. (See Exercise 1 for examples.)

Evaluating copy: Hand out copies of previously published school documents (yearbooks, newspapers, arts programs, announcements). In small groups of four or five, have students mark all uses of coordinating conjunctions. Identify sentences that can be improved with stronger coordinated elements. Edit and revise the selected sentences to strengthen the reader's interpretation of the reported images and actions that make up the story.

CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS

Readers respond with interest to a writer's built-in descriptions of dual behavioral contrasts, differing points of view and unique perceptions of how different individuals respond to circumstances. Suppose, for example, the school's star basketball player is "a good sport on the basketball court" and also "a good sport off the field." Or imagine that the reporter learned that the local politician has not responded to the principal's telephone calls and has not responded to e-mails — in fact, has not communicated anything to the principal about an important issue. For each of these stated facts, the correlative conjunction efficiently connects ("coordinates") the dual ideas being described.

- Justin is a good sport, **both** on **and** off the court. (*contrasting prepositions*)
- The senator has **neither** telephoned **nor** written to the principal. (*contrasting verbs*)

Other examples:

- The superintendent said, "**Neither** will I meet your committee in the gym, **nor** will I come to your club room." (*contrasting assertions — "will I"*)
- The superintendent said, "**Either** I will meet your committee in the gym, **or** I will come to your club room." (*contrasting assertions — "I will"*)

One set of correlative conjunctions partners to connect ideas:

- **Not only** the coaches and players **but also** the fans had high hopes of defeating the second-place White Tigers. (*contrasting elements in the sentence*)

NOTE: Correct usage requires pairing all four words: **not only ... but also**. Deleting any of these words makes the sentence incorrect and less effective.

NEWSWORTHY SENTENCES EXERCISE

EXERCISE 4: CONJUNCTIONS AS PAIRS

Correlative conjunctions function as named: They co-relate information — a function that helps readers immediately grasp either the partnership or the relationship on two levels. That is why it is essential to use them in pairs as listed previously. Writers who conscientiously connect ideas with correlative conjunctions make the copy read clearly and easily. By paying attention to this detail, journalists speed the thinking process for readers without injecting opinion.

Instruct students to bring their most recent story and interview notes from journalism class and/or publication assignments (recently published or being developed for upcoming issues).

- Assign groups of three or four students to describe the situation they reported and to recall as closely as possible the nuances of contrasting ideas, elements and viewpoints they heard or observed.
- Assign students individually or as a team to construct sentences reflecting contrasting elements that use correlative conjunctions:
 - Both ... and
 - Either ... or
 - Neither ... nor
 - Not only ... but also
- Instruct students to examine state and national professional newspapers for writing that employs correlative conjunctions or that could be edited to strengthen reader interest.

SUBORDINATE CONJUNCTIONS

Subordinate clauses are hitchhikers, and the subordinate conjunctions are the thumbs that hitch the ride. The subordinate constructions prize their role: providing valuable information to make the independent clauses classy. They present more details to readers but always in context and with respect to the main focus of the story.

The small conjunctions earn their rides because they add background, circumstances, results and time factors to main ideas of sentences. Though subordinate conjunctions are usually small words, they mislead readers when writers overlook their importance and their implications. As a result, writers and editors must use great care when they select the conjunction.

PUNCTUATION:

When the subordinate conjunction/ clause follows the independent clause, do not use a comma.

When the subordinate conjunction/ clause begins the sentence, use a comma at the end of the dependent clause before the independent clause begins.

SELECTING THE BEST SUBORDINATE CONJUNCTION

FOR	SUBORDINATE CONJUNCTION
for time	before, after, when, while, since, until
for cause/effect	because, since, so, that
for contrast	although, though, whereas, while
for condition	if, unless, whether

TARGETING COMMON MISTAKES

WRITERS SHOULD AVOID...	INSTEAD, THEY SHOULD USE...
<i>wordiness</i> whether or not even if or even though	whether if or though
<i>cause effect</i> since (requires information about time) if (implies condition)	because (details a noun) as though/sometimes although (states a circumstance)
<i>time/situation</i> when (during a time period) while (during a process) also consider before (time flow)	after (following completion of process)

NEWSWORTHY SENTENCES EXERCISE

EXERCISE 5: LINKS TO CLARIFY CONNECTIONS

Study the list of subordinate abuses. Discuss how the choice makes subtle distinctions, and stress how both writers and editors can make their copy more powerful and comprehensible with a better choice. Suggest examples of ways misuse can distort the intent of stories. Then work on editing skills by changing one word in sentences that have appeared in high-school newspapers throughout the United States.

Circle the conjunction that needs to be improved. In the space at the left, write the correction that should be used for the final print copy.

- | | |
|-------|--|
| _____ | 1. When managing school, soccer and new friends, Nelson also remains close to her British friends. |
| _____ | 2. While the Center for Civil and Human Rights has a long way to go before teaching its goal of gathering people together, McDonald thinks that it has the potential to do so. |
| _____ | 3. The parent and her son knew the college admissions officer would clarify whether or not the student was a legal resident of the United States. |
| _____ | 4. Though the immigrant and her family hid on the mountain range for one night, she and her brother had only one small blanket to keep themselves warm. |
| _____ | 5. The assistant superintendent of instruction advocated innovative curriculum changes for seniors because they have experienced three years of similar academic approaches. |
| _____ | 6. Even though they seem like friends, business owner Nick Barnes and sophomore Brianne Barnes still recognize their roles as father and daughter. |
| _____ | 7. Another option if college students are visiting family is to talk to them in advance and to suggest taking walks or exercising together. |
| _____ | 8. While citizens complain about social options in Slacktown, they should consider themselves lucky to live in such a nationally acclaimed city and county. |
| _____ | 9. At the end of the presentation, the police officer asked Morgan if he would like to ride along with him the following Saturday. |
| _____ | 10. While the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals stayed Young's execution, it granted his lawyers 25 days to file counter arguments. |
| _____ | 11. The army veteran saw his opportunity to offset his participation in the Iraqi war after, upon moving to Vermont, he met an artist specializing in paper-making. |
| _____ | 12. The lab asked Jones to return for a follow-up appointment after the mammogram revealed an abnormal lump. |
| _____ | 13. The dean feels as if he should utilize his experiences to affect the educational opportunities at Center High School. |
| _____ | 14. While Brigitte attends UGA, she will major in special education. |
| _____ | 15. While the counselor believes City High School is "pretty open-minded" about gay students, he believes there is always room for improvement. |
| _____ | 16. After the first quarter, the football team determined its defensive strategy for the entire game. |
| _____ | 17. While planning their rampage throughout the neighboring county, the young men had intended to burn five churches in small towns. |
| _____ | 18. Students can view the podcast as many times as they need since they have personal access to the download. |
| _____ | 19. Classroom teachers are required to turn off lights whenever they exit labs or classrooms. |
| _____ | 20. When explaining what it is like to have a brother on the same basketball team, both said, "I wouldn't have any other way." |

NEWSWORTHY SENTENCES ANSWERS

CONJUNCTIONS LINK SIMILARITIES OF DETAILS

EXERCISE 1

Connecting words

1. nouns
2. adjectives
3. adverbs
4. verbs
5. adverbs.

Connecting phrases:

6. gerund phrases (nominals)
7. Adjective-noun pairs
8. gerund phrases (nominals)
9. prepositional phrases
10. verbals.

Connecting clauses

11. adverbial clauses
12. adjectival clauses
(introduced with relative pronouns)
13. independent clauses
14. noun clauses
15. independent clauses.

EXERCISE 5

1. While for "When"
2. Though for "While"
3. whether for "whether or not"
4. When for "Though"
5. since for "because"
6. Though for "Even though"
7. when for "if"
8. Though for "While"
9. whether for "if"
10. When for "While"
11. when for "after"
12. because for "after"
13. as though for "as if"
14. When for "While"
15. Because for "While"
16. Before for "After"
17. When for "While"
18. because for "since"
19. when for "whenever"
20. While for "When"