

More on Combining Sentences

On our earlier grammar handout, we looked at a variety of ways of combining sentences when two sentences are relatively equal in importance (using coordination).

Another important strategy to keep in mind when you write and revise is consider when two ideas relate to each other with different logical relationships, especially cause and effect, but also when you want to show a contrast or distinction.

To do this, you will need to use **subordination**, a word that in grammar just means that one idea is less important than another. Using subordinating conjunctions will let you combine ideas and let you express ideas that include logical relationships.

Additionally, when you want to add information to a sentence, often adding a clause or part of a sentence that adds information to a noun (a person, place or thing), you can often do this more effectively using relative pronouns like **that**, **which** and **who/whom**.

Becoming more familiar with these ‘sentence patterns’ will let you write with more style and logic. (It will also improve your use of commas since the rules for subordinating sentences/clauses and relative pronouns can help you use commas correctly.)

I. Connecting Sentences with Subordinating Conjunctions

Use sentence subordination to combine two sentences that aren’t equally important. ‘Subordinating conjunctions’ and ‘relative pronouns’ help you express the logical connection between the sentences.

● Subordinating Conjunctions

because [cause and effect]
since

though [contrast/distinction]
although
while

BEFORE

People are marrying later in life. The divorce rate has not decreased.

AFTER (COMBINED)

Although people are marrying late later in life, the divorce rate has not decreased.

(EXPRESS A CONTRAST)

When you place a subordinating conjunction before one of the two sentences, it becomes a *dependent clause*. A dependent clause should express the less important idea. A dependent clause is not a complete sentence. It can't stand on its own; therefore it is dependent on another part of the sentence (the independent, or main, clause). If you have ever had problems with fragments, you may have been trying to use dependent clauses as standalone sentences.

COMMA RULES WITH DEPENDENT CLAUSES:

**Use a comma after the dependent clause if the dependent clause comes first in the sentence.

**IMPORTANT! Don't use a comma if the dependent clause comes last.

[INDEPENDENT CLAUSE]	[DEPENDENT CLAUSE]
The divorce rate has not decreased	although people are marrying later in life.

[NO COMMA]

[DEPENDENT CLAUSE]	[INDEPENDENT CLAUSE]
Although people are marrying later in life,	the divorce rate has not decreased.

[COMMA!]

"Never put a comma before a 'coordinating conjunction' like although or because."

● EXAMPLES

• CAUSE AND EFFECT: BECAUSE / SINCE

CAUSE	EFFECT
I studied for two hours.	I passed the exam.

I got a flu shot. I didn't catch the flu this year.

CAUSE	EFFECT
<u>Because</u> I studied for two hours,	I passed the exam.

Since I got a flu shot, I didn't catch the flu this year.

USE COMMA --
DEPENDENT CLAUSE COMES FIRST.

EFFECT	CAUSE
I passed the exam <u>because</u> I studied for three hours.	

I didn't catch the flu since I got a flu shot.

NO COMMA --
DEPENDENT CLAUSE COMES LAST.

• **PROVIDING A REASON: BECAUSE / SINCE**

I really wanted a copy of the new song. I downloaded it.

I needed a copy of the e-book for a paper. I used the LaGuardia Library website to get one.

Because I really wanted the new song, I downloaded it. USE COMMA --
DEPENDENT CLAUSE COMES FIRST.

Since I needed a copy of the e-book for a paper, I used the LaGuardia Library website to get one.

NO COMMA --
DEPENDENT CLAUSE COMES LAST.

(NOTICE THAT SOMETIMES YOU WOULD CHANGE NOUNS/PRONOUNS FOR BETTER READABILITY.)

I downloaded the new song because I really wanted a copy of it.

I used the LaGuardia Library website to get the e-book since I needed a copy for a paper.

• **MAKING A DISTINCTION: ALTHOUGH / THOUGH / WHILE**

BEFORE

Personal essays can teach us about society. It is unreliable to use only personal evidence to analyze social problems.

I worked hard on the paper. It still had a few grammar mistakes.

Robert Moses was a power broker who ruined many traditional neighborhoods. He also was largely responsible for improving New York City's highway system.

AFTER (COMBINED)

USE COMMA --
DEPENDENT CLAUSE COMES FIRST.

While personal essays can teach us about society, it is ~~unreliable to use only~~ personal evidence to analyze social problems.

Though I worked hard on the paper, it still had a few grammar mistakes.

Although Robert Moses was a power broker who ruined many traditional neighborhoods, he also was largely responsible for improving New York City's highway system.

NO COMMA --

DEPENDENT CLAUSE COMES LAST.

It is unreliable to use only personal evidence to analyze social problems while [even though] personal essays can [still] teach us about society.

The paper still had a few grammar mistakes though I worked hard on it.

Robert Moses was largely responsible for improving New York City's highway system although he was also a power broker who ruined many traditional neighborhoods.

II. Relative Pronouns

Another way to combine short sentences is to use a *relative pronoun* and a dependent clause.

Very often, you use this kind of sentence pattern to add information that modifies or describes a noun. Used correctly, you can really add to your repertoire of sentences with relative pronouns and dependent clauses.

If you have ever had trouble with 'choppy writing,' one way to fix this is to combine shorter sentences into ones that use relative pronouns with clauses that contain the 'dependent' information.

● COMMON RELATIVE PRONOUNS

that [for things]	who [for people]
which	whom
whose	

RULE: A clause with that never take commas – it is 'restrictive.'

A clause with which usually takes commas – it is usually 'non-restrictive.'

BEFORE

Dorothea baked the cupcakes. They were delicious.

AFTER

Dorothea baked the cupcakes, **which** were delicious.

BEFORE

The letter to the editor was published in the newspaper. Anita wrote the letter.

AFTER

The letter **that Anita wrote** was published online in the newspaper. [THAT = NO COMMAS]

BEFORE

The letter is still in folder. It is on the topic of school funding.

AFTER

The letter, which is on the topic of school funding, is still in the folder. [WHICH = USE COMMAS]

III. Trying It Out

Combine the following sentences with some of the above techniques. Use the hints for which type of 'connecting word' or strategy to use.

Of course, you could use 'coordination' for some of these, but try to use 'subordination' instead. Subordination is often better at conveying logical relationships between ideas and more subtle distinctions; therefore, it is really useful in 'formal' writing.

- 1) Many personal essays make use of very personal information. The beginning of Shirley Lim's "Two Lives" uses a detached, third-person voice that distances the reader.

(Show a distinction or contrast.)

- 2) I usually take the train. Today I took the bus.

(Show a distinction or contrast.)

- 3) Stronger DUI laws have been enacted in several states. The number of arrests for DUI have decreased around the country.

(Show cause and effect.)

- 4) Amy Tan suggests that her mother's use of language was 'fractured.' Her way of using English was actually very rich and extremely creative.

(Show another distinction or contrast.)

- 5) I did not rent the apartment. The building was too far away.

(Show a cause and effect / reason.)

- 6) Amy Tan published The Joy Luck Club in 1989 and won a National Book Award. The Joy Luck Club is probably her most famous novel.

(Use a relative pronoun with a clause to describe Tan's novel.)

- 7) The book has over ten short essays by the same author. It has a blue cover and has 200 pages.

(Use a relative pronoun with a clause to combine sentences.)

- 8) I have a hard time recycling my garbage. The recycling bins are in the basement of my building.

(Show a reason.)

- 9) Gary Soto's essay tells the story of working hard in a tire factory where physical labor was brutal. The tire factory processed used tires.

(Combine with a relative pronoun to describe the tire factory).

- 10) Many personal essays use private experiences to comment on wider social questions. Some essays give us such a personal perspective that it is hard to know what to make of the author's opinion.

(Show another distinction or contrast.)