

Section 14 conjunctions, clauses and tenses

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language notes

The analysis on this page is provided for students who like to have a 'map' of the overall structure of the language they are studying. (Some do, some don't.) The terminology has little practical importance for most learners.

In some languages, conjunctions and linking adverbs may not be clearly separate categories. And note that the whole sentence-clause-conjunction structure discussed here is typical of European languages, but may not correspond to the organisation of some students' mother tongues.

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In some languages, the meaning of a conjunction may be backed up by an adverb. This can lead to occasional mistakes in English:

**Although she was tired, but she went to work.*

For speakers of languages that work differently from English, it may seem strange to have a conjunction (which joins two clauses) right at the beginning of a sentence instead of between the clauses.

For problems relating to the distinction between conjunctions and adverbs (e.g. *but* and *however*) in formal writing, see pages 254–256.

possible further activities

Personalisation: one conjunction is enough Get students to complete the following sentences:

I'm (un)happy because ...

I'm (un)happy although ...

Then get them to rewrite their sentences like this:

..., so I'm (un)happy.

..., but I'm (un)happy.

Both ways round Get students to complete one or more of the following sentences, using them as both beginnings and endings. Who can think of the most interesting completions?

... because there was a horse in the garden.

... because they're good for me.

... because she lost her temper.

... although he had really big feet.

... although the cat was asleep on it.

... although it was really terrible.

For example:

I knew Aunt Mary had arrived because there was a horse in the garden.

Because there was a horse in the garden, I knew Aunt Mary had arrived.

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It's possible to have a list of adjectives without *and*. However, this is usually rather poetic in tone, and is avoided in ordinary formal writing.

She was exotic, mysterious, inscrutable. His whole soul yearned to grasp the enigma of her being. And yet, ...

possible further activities

Invention Who can find the best way of beginning this sentence?

... and disappeared for ever.

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possible further activities

Internet: prediction How would students expect this sentence to continue?

She both sings and ...

Get them to check on the internet. What are the most common continuations? Are there any they didn't think of?

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Students are normally taught that we use present tenses to talk about the future after time conjunctions (*I'll phone when I **arrive***) and after *if* (*We'll have the party indoors if it **rains***). In fact, this also happens in other situations:

*They'll give us as much **as** we **ask** for.*

*The man **who marries** my daughter will need a lot of patience.*

*I'll give a reward to **whoever finds** my watch.*

*I'll go **where** you **go**.*

This is part of a more general tendency to simplify tenses in subordinate clauses, explained on these pages.

possible further activities

Scheduling activities Divide students into groups of three or four. Tell them that they have to carry out the following tasks; groups have five minutes to decide in what order they will do them. They can leave one out.

clean the windows

paint the walls

take a break

write a song

go for a walk

learn a lot of irregular verbs

have a party

They then have to report as follows, listing the tasks in their chosen order:

We'll start by ...ing.

After we've ..., we'll ...

After we've ..., we'll ...

Personalisation Students complete some or all of the following sentences:

I won't be happy until ...

I'll give a reward to whoever ...

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I'm going to live somewhere where ...
I want to ... before I ...

Internet Get students to look for interesting sentences on the internet beginning "I won't be happy until" or "We won't rest until".

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language notes

English past tenses are used not only to express distance in time, but also other kinds of 'distance': interpersonal distance (see page 290), and indefiniteness or unreality (for example in conditional sentences, and in the structures dealt with on this page).

The use of a past tense in a clause after *I'd rather* and *It's time* may take time for students to get used to.

Tense use with *If only* and *I wish* is slightly more complex than shown here, but the refinements are generally unimportant for students.

possible further activities

Preferences Ask students if they would like an irregular verb test. It is up to them to tell you what they would rather do instead, using *I'd rather* + infinitive.

Mime In pairs, students mime situations in which one is telling the other 'It's time you ...'. The others have to decide (more or less) what sentence is being mimed. Give out sentences for miming on cards if students need help. Possibilities:

It's time you:
went to bed.
woke up.
had your hair cut.
cleaned your shoes.
got new glasses.
went to the dentist.
did your music practice.
cooked supper.
gave me a kiss.

Time travel Tell students that they have been transported back in time to the 17th century. Which three 21st-century things do they wish they had? They should write sentences beginning 'I wish I had ...' or 'If only I had ...'. Then ask for everybody's wishes – what are the most common ones?