

14 COORDINATION—SUBORDINATION

A clause that expresses a complete thought and that can stand alone as a sentence is called an **independent** or **main clause**. A clause that does not express a complete thought and that cannot stand alone as a sentence is called a **dependent** or **subordinate clause**. Clauses can be linked together through **coordination** or **subordination**.

Coordination is used to join ideas of *equal importance*. Coordination conjunctions are *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*, which can be remembered with the acronym FANBOYS.

- ❖ When joining ideas of equal importance, be sure to choose the coordination conjunction that correctly, concisely, and logically expresses the relationship between the ideas.

No: **Helen broke her wrist yesterday, and she will not be able to practice her violin concerto.** (*And* expresses that the two ideas are of equal weight and importance.)

No: **Helen broke her wrist yesterday, yet she will not be able to practice her violin concerto.** (*Yet* expresses that the second clause contradicts the first.)

Yes: **Helen broke her wrist yesterday, so she will not be able to practice her violin concerto.** (*So* correctly expresses the idea that the idea in the first clause causes the second clause.)

Subordination is used when a writer wants to join two ideas that are *not* equally important; subordination links the less important idea to the more important idea. Subordinate clauses can be identified by the presence of subordinating conjunctions (for example: *although, as, after, since, before, unless, until, when, while, if, because*) or of relative pronouns (*who, whom, whoever, whomever, whose, that, which*).

- ❖ When using subordination, remember that the main idea of a sentence (the idea that you want to emphasize) should be expressed in the main clause, and the secondary idea (the idea that plays a minor role in the sentence) should be expressed in the subordinate clause.

For example, in the sentence, “**Unless we finish this project soon, we will fail this class,**” the emphasis is on the clause about failing the class. On the other hand, in the sentence, “**We must finish this project before we fail this class,**” emphasizes the need to finish the project.

- ❖ Using subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns often makes for clearer and more concise sentences than repeated coordinating conjunctions.

OK: **Franco’s has a sister, and she is his best friend, and they hang out together all the time.**

Better: **Because Franco’s sister is his best friend, they hang out together all the time.**

Or: **Franco’s sister, who is his best friend, hangs out with him all the time.**

- ❖ When joining ideas of unequal importance, be sure to choose the subordinating word that correctly, concisely, and logically expresses the relationship between the ideas.

No: **Because Gwen is petite, she has the fire and substance of an Amazon warrior.**

Yes: **Although Gwen is petite, she has the fire and substance of an Amazon warrior.**



Problems with coordination-subordination are often the result of wordy, illogical, unclear, or awkward expressions of ideas, so be sure to look out for these kinds of errors as well. For further help, see Handout 8—Wordiness or Handout 12—Parallelism.