

Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch...

Laurie Endicott Thomas, MA, ELS

Grammar is the study of how words are altered and combined to form sentences. Thus, a solid understanding of grammatical principles helps you identify and solve problems within sentences. Yet nearly any piece of writing consists of more than 1 sentence. Thus, writers need to show how sentences relate to each other. Conjunctive adverbs and conjunctive adverbial phrases help you do that. For example, the conjunctive adverb *meanwhile* tells you that the action or state of being described by that sentence is simultaneous with the action or state of being that was described by the previous sentence. The adverbial phrase *back at the ranch* alerts you to a shift in scene from 1 sentence to the next.

Conjunctive adverbs can be distinguished from 2 other kinds of adverb: adjuncts and disjuncts. Adjuncts are adverbs that modify a particular element within the sentence, such as a verb. Disjuncts (sentence adverbs) don't modify an element within the sentence; instead, they are used to express the speaker or writer's opinion about the content of the clause or sentence (eg, *fortunately*, *obviously*). I discussed the difference between adjuncts and disjuncts in the fall issue of *AMWA Journal* last year.¹

To use a conjunctive adverb or conjunctive adverbial phrase correctly, you must first think clearly about the relationship between the clauses and sentences that you wish to connect. For example, you can use the conjunctive adverbial phrase *for example* to indicate that you are about to give specific examples of some general principle that you have just stated. The word *however* is used to introduce a statement that conflicts with or seems to contradict something else that you have just said. *Therefore* is used to mark the conclusion of an argument, after the premises that support that conclusion have already been stated. You can also use the words *first*, *second*, *third* and so on as conjunctive

adverbs to show how the minor sentences in a paragraph relate to the topic sentence:

- ☺ There are 3 reasons why we need to buy a new computer. First, our current computer is slow. Second, ...

The rules for word order and punctuation for conjunctive adverbs are simple. If the conjunctive adverb occurs at the beginning of the sentence or clause, it should be set off with a comma:

- ☺ We're out of baking powder. *However*, we can use baking soda and cream of tartar as a substitute.

Use a semicolon and a comma if the conjunctive adverb or adverbial phrase is linking 2 independent clauses:

- ☺ We're out of baking powder; *however*, we can use baking soda and cream of tartar as a substitute.

The conjunctive adverb may need to be set off with commas if it disrupts the flow of a clause:

- ☺ There are, *however*, several exceptions to the rule.

You don't need commas if the conjunctive adverb doesn't disrupt the flow of the sentence, especially if it is placed between the auxiliary and stem of the main verb:

- ☺ It would *therefore* be impossible to fly at a speed faster than the speed of light.

Of course, some words that can be used as conjunctive adverbs aren't always used as conjunctive adverbs. The word *however* can be used as a conjunction (as in "You can decorate it *however* you like") or as a conjunctive adverb. Also, there are some words (eg, *thus*) that can function as adjuncts or as conjunctive adverbs.

Conjunctive adverbs enable you to connect clauses and sentences. Thus, you can use them to show how your ideas are connected to each other. Careful use of conjunctive adverbs can help you to improve the coherence of your writing and even of your thoughts.

One useful exercise for improving your writing skills is to compile your own list of conjunctive adverbs and adverbial phrases. Classify them according to their function, such as showing temporal relationships or logical relationships. Keep the list handy when you are writing. Here is a short list to get you started:

Addition: furthermore, moreover, in addition, likewise

Apposition: for example, for instance, that is, namely

Cause and effect: consequently, as a result

Concession: nevertheless, however, of course

Contrast: in contrast, rather, on the other hand

Logical relationships: therefore, thus, ergo

Reinforcement: indeed, in fact

Summary: in conclusion, in short

Time: meanwhile, subsequently, thereafter, henceforth

Laurie Endicott Thomas is the author of Not Trivial: How Studying the Traditional Liberal Arts Can Set You Free.

Author contact: *Lthomas521@verizon.net*

References

1. Thomas LE. Editorialize with sentence adverbs. *AMWA J.* 2013(3): 128–129.

Glossary

adverb—a member of a class of words that typically serve as a modifier of a verb, an adjective, another adverb, a preposition, a phrase, a clause, or a sentence. Adverbs express some relation of manner or quality, place, time, degree, number, cause, opposition, affirmation, or denial. In English, adverbs can be used to connect clauses and sentences and to express the speaker's or writer's view about what the clause or sentence is saying.

clause—a string of words that contains a subject and a predicate and that functions as a member of a complex or compound sentence.

complex sentence—a sentence that contains at least 1 independent clause and at least 1 dependent clause.

compound sentence—a sentence that contains more than 1 independent clause.

compound-complex sentence—a sentence that contains at least 2 independent clauses and at least 1 dependent clause.

conjunction—a member of a class of words that are used to connect words, phrases, clauses, or sentences to each other. Coordinating conjunctions (and, or, but, nor, for, yet, so) connect elements that are coordinate (ie, of equal rank within the sentence). Subordinating conjunctions (eg, if, then, while, whereas) connect a subordinate clause to an independent clause).

conjunctive adverb—an adverb that connects two or more clauses or sentences.

independent clause—a clause that could stand on its own as a sentence because it expresses a complete thought.

sentence adverb—an adverb that is used to express the speaker's or writer's opinion about the content of a clause or sentence; also called a disjunct (see “Editorialize with Sentence Adverbs” *AMWA J.* 2013;28(3):128–129).

subordinate clause—also called a dependent clause, a clause that cannot stand on its own as a sentence because it expresses an incomplete thought. Subordinate clauses typically begin with a subordinating clause or a relative pronoun.

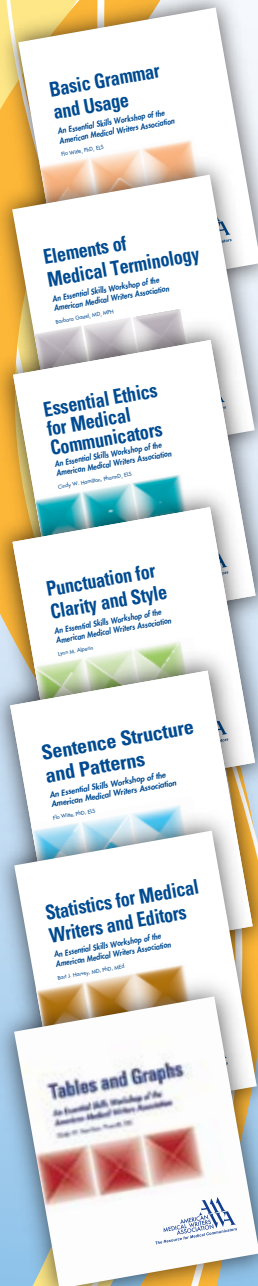
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