



Expansion Activities
Understanding and Using English Grammar, 3rd Edition
Chapter 16: Coordinating Conjunctions

Activity: A Hands-On Demonstration for Avoiding Run-On Sentences

Materials needed: Two different colored electrical wires, 7-10 inches each, (make three sets of these wires), regular transparent tape, a wire connector with a bright color. (To prepare the wires, make sure the plastic coating is cut away 2 inches from one end of each wire. Use a different set of wires for each part of the demo because once you cut the plastic the ends get bent and tangled and a little harder to work with.)

Description: A typical writing problem is the incorrect connection of independent clauses. It's one thing to teach the rule **IC, Coordinating Conjunction IC**, and another thing for students to apply it consistently in their papers. This activity brings visuals to the grammar explanation, which is often just using words to teach about words. It is especially helpful for tactile/kinesthetic students.

Bring three students to the front of the class. Give one wire to two students and have the other student standing by.

Explain to the students:

“Each colored wire represents a single independent clause. To add variety to our writing, we sometimes want to combine these clauses into a single sentence. However, there are clause-combining rules that we need to follow in our writing.”

“Let’s say the black wire is ‘Matt was hungry’ and the white wire is ‘He made himself a sandwich.’ What is something simple we do to connect these two wires, these two independent clauses?”

(You want to elicit “twist the wires together” or something similar. When someone suggests it, ask the third student in front of the class to twist the wires together, with the other two students still each holding one part.)

“Do you think this connection is strong and secure?” (Take the wire from the two students in front and give it to two other students in their seats.) **“Try to separate our two clauses. They come apart pretty easily, don’t they? So is just pushing the wires together a good way to combine them?”** (Elicit – No.)

“So let’s try another way to make a connection.” (Hand another pair of wires to the students in the front. Try to elicit that they can be taped together. Someone usually comes up with it! Bring out the tape and ask a third student to tape the wires together.)



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“What do you think about this connection? Is it a strong one?” (Ask the pair holding the wires to bring them to seated students and ask the seated students to give them a tug. The wires will fall apart.)

“So tape was not a good idea either. Let’s try one more thing.” (Bring out the connector and the final set of wires. As the two students each hold a wire, attach the connector securely. The teacher should do this -- after a little practice -- because if the student doesn’t do it right, the wires will fall apart and blow the demonstration! Then bring the connector-attached wires to seated students and ask them to tug. The wires will not come apart.)

“It looks like we finally have a secure connection for our two wires and our two independent clauses! Now, let’s see how this relates to our writing.”

You can use the pictures below or have the actual three sets of wires displayed. Relate the first set to a fused sentence (the clauses are mashed together), the second set to a comma splice (the tape represents the “weak” comma), and the third set to the *comma + fanboys* combination.

Here are photos showing the different wire combinations:

