

# Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions in German are very much like English, with one exception that we'll discuss below. In all cases, word order is very simple: each clause acts independently and **has the same word order as if it were standing on its own**. The verb in each clause is in the SECOND position for statements (and the first position for yes/no questions).

Ich spiele gern Klavier. Ich singe.	⇒ Ich spiele gern Klavier <u>und</u> ich singe.
Ich gehe zur Klasse. Heute ist Montag.	⇒ Ich gehe zur Klasse, <u>denn</u> heute ist Montag.
Gehst du ins Bett? Bleibst du auf?	⇒ Gehst du ins Bett, <u>oder</u> bleibst du auf?

The coordinating conjunctions in German are:

<i>aber</i>	= but	(often has a comma)
<i>denn</i>	= because	(usually requires a comma)
<i>oder</i>	= or	
<i>sondern</i>	= but rather	(usually requires a comma)
<i>und</i>	= and	

As you see, German has two words that can both be expressed by 'but' -- aber and sondern. These may cause problems for you, so let's discuss those two in depth. **ABER** means “but, however, nevertheless”. This is the standard “but” meaning, which expresses information that contrasts with the first statement, but does not completely contradict it:

Der Film ist nicht lang, aber interessant.  
Ich spiele gern Tennis, aber mein Freund spielt lieber Karten.

**SONDERN** means “instead, on the contrary, but rather”. It indicates a contrast between two things that are mutually exclusive, the first of which is expressed in the negative (so you should look for a '*nicht*' or '*kein*' in the first half of the sentence). Again, the two halves of the sentence must be mutually exclusive in order for you to use *sondern*.

Es ist nicht warm, sondern kalt.  
Ich bleibe nicht zu Hause, sondern ich gehe in die Bibliothek.

Compare the following sentences:

Er bleibt zu Hause, aber sie geht einkaufen.      Er bleibt heute nicht zu Hause, sondern geht einkaufen.  
*He's staying at home, but she's going shopping. He's not staying home today; instead he's going shopping.*

Das ist kein Wein, aber es ist kein Problem.      Das ist kein Wein, sondern Wasser.  
*That's not wine, but it's not a problem.      That's not wine, that's water.*

Rolf macht es nicht, aber die Kinder machen es. Nicht Rolf macht es, sondern die Kinder.  
*Rolf isn't doing it, but the kids are.      It isn't Rolf that's doing it, but rather the kids who are.*