Coordinators and Subordinators

Simple sentences can be joined together to make longer, more complex sentences by using coordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions. A conjunction is a word or a type of punctuation that is used to connect sentences or parts of sentences and show the relationship between them. Clauses are parts of sentences that have both a subject and a verb (not to be confused with phrases, which often lack one or the other and cannot stand alone). There are two types of clauses that we will address here: independent clauses and dependent clauses.

Independent Clauses
An independent clause is like a simple sentence; it can stand on its own. When two independent clauses are joined, each clause is considered to be of equal rank with the other.

The dog is exhausted.
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The dog went to sleep immediately.
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There are several ways to join independent clauses.

1. Use one of the FANBOYS, which are coordinating conjunctions. They are For, And, Nor, But, Or, So. A comma should precede a FANBOY.

The dog is exhausted, so he went to sleep immediately.

2. Use a semicolon. It functions as a sort of chain link to join two independent clauses and tells the reader that the two clauses that it joins are part of the same idea.

The dog is exhausted; he went to sleep immediately.

3. Conjunctive Adverbs. This is just a big, scary word to describe words that we use all the time. They are words that are designated to join independent clauses. Some conjunctive adverbs include also, besides, hence, therefore, consequently, furthermore, thereafter, however, namely, and thus. For a more complete list, consult a grammar or usage book. You can use a conjunctive adverb with a period or semicolon before and a comma after it.

The dog is exhausted; therefore, it went to sleep immediately.

The dog is exhausted. Therefore, it went to sleep immediately.
Caution!

Beware the comma splice or the run-on. A comma splice is when two independent clauses are joined with only a comma. It is common to see them because many writers make a stylistic choice to join clauses this way, but it is best to avoid them in academic writing.

The dog is exhausted, he went to sleep immediately.

A run-on is when two independent clauses are put next to each other with no punctuation or coordinating conjunction.

The dog is exhausted he went to sleep immediately.