

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.