SPOTTING THE ERRORS

CONJUNCTIONS

A Self-Help Booklet for AFCAT Aspirants

Connecting Ideas Correctly · Discovery-Based Learning · Self-Assessment

What's Inside This Booklet

1. **Step up your Success** — your motivational kick-off
2. **How Do Spotting-Errors Questions on Conjunction Look?** — sample questions, answered and explained
3. **What Do You Understand by Conjunction?** — discovery-based concept notes
4. **Would You Assess Yourself As You Learn?** — two fresh 15-question practice sets
5. **Check Your Target Learning Performance** — the complete answer key with explanations

Your Target Learning Goals for This Booklet

✓ Recognise the three families of conjunctions — coordinating, subordinating and correlative — on sight.

✓ Apply the correlative-pair rules (either-or, neither-nor, both-and, not only-but also, whether-or) with confidence.

✓ Master the scarcely/hardly-when and no sooner-than time-correlative trap.

✓ Fix subject-verb agreement in neither-nor / not only-but also sentences using the proximity rule.

✓ Spot and correct the unless, lest, suppose, different-from and other-than errors that examiners love to hide.

Step up for Success

Dear AFCAT Aspirants,

Welcome back! If Verbs are the engine of a sentence, Conjunctions are the wiring — the small words that connect clauses, and in the General English paper, one misplaced 'than' or a stray 'that' can short-circuit an otherwise perfect answer. 'Spotting Errors – Conjunctions' simply tests whether you can hear when two halves of a sentence refuse to click together.

By the end of this booklet, you will instantly recognise correlative pairs, dodge the scarcely/hardly-when and no sooner-than trap, and fix subject-verb agreement in neither-nor sentences — all at exam speed.

Remember: accuracy first, speed later. So read slowly today, and race tomorrow. Let's wire this up!

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How Do Spotting-Errors Questions on Conjunction Look?

Every question in this section gives you one sentence, broken into three underlined parts — (a), (b) and (c). One of them may carry an error of conjunction usage; if the sentence is already correct, you mark option (d), 'No error'. Here are ten sentences to get your eye trained before we unpack the rules behind them.

Q1. Hardly had the flight taken off (a)/ than the turbulence began (b)/ and passengers grew anxious. (c)/ No error (d)

Q2. She is not only brilliant (a)/ but also she is hardworking (b)/ in everything she attempts. (c)/ No error (d)

Q3. Neither the coach nor the players (a)/ was ready (b)/ for the sudden change in strategy. (c)/ No error (d)

Q4. He has no other interest (a)/ except reading (b)/ historical novels. (c)/ No error (d)

Q5. Unless you don't submit the form today, (a)/ your application (b)/ will not be considered. (c)/ No error (d)

Q6. Both the manager as well as his assistant (a)/ were present (b)/ at the review meeting. (c)/ No error (d)

Q7. She looked at the results as if (a)/ she already knows (b)/ the outcome. (c)/ No error (d)

Q8. He asked me that where (a)/ I had kept (b)/ his umbrella. (c)/ No error (d)

Q9. It is nothing else than (a)/ his own negligence (b)/ that caused the delay. (c)/ No error (d)

Q10. Speak softly, lest (a)/ you should not wake (b)/ the sleeping child. (c)/ No error (d)

Answers & Explanations

Q	Ans	Explanation
1	(b)	'Hardly' must be followed by 'when', never by 'than'. Correct: "when the turbulence began".
2	(b)	The two halves of 'not only…but also' must match in form. Correct: "but also hardworking" (adjective, not a full clause).
3	(b)	In 'neither…nor', the verb agrees with the nearer noun 'players' (plural). Correct: "were ready".
4	(b)	After the comparative 'other', use 'than', never 'except'. Correct: "other interest than reading".
5	(a)	'Unless' already means 'if not'; adding 'don't' double-negates. Correct: "Unless you submit the form today".
6	(a)	'Both' is followed by 'and', never by 'as well as'. Correct: "Both the manager and his assistant".

Q	Ans	Explanation
7	(b)	After 'as if' describing a hypothetical, use the past subjunctive. Correct: "she already knew".
8	(a)	'That' is dropped before an indirect interrogative clause. Correct: "He asked me where…".
9	(a)	'Nothing else' is followed by 'but', not 'than'. Correct: "nothing else but".
10	(b)	'Lest' already carries a negative sense and cannot take 'not'; it takes 'should' alone. Correct: "lest you should wake".

What Do You Understand by Conjunction?

Before we hand you a single rule, we want you to find it yourself. Read each short example, sit with the 'Can You Spot the Pattern?' question, and only then open the 'Rule Unlocked' box below it. This is how real command over grammar is built — not by memorising a list, but by noticing a pattern often enough that it starts to sound right (and its opposite starts to sound wrong).

Let's begin with a mystery

Can You Spot the Pattern?

Read these two aloud:

(i) "I called her. She was busy."

(ii) "I called her, but she was busy."

What single word changes everything about how these two ideas relate to each other?

✓ Rule Unlocked

You spotted it instantly — the word 'but'. Remove it, and you have two flat, disconnected facts. Add it back, and you have a relationship: contrast. A conjunction joins words, phrases or clauses and signals exactly how they relate — addition (and), contrast (but), choice (or), cause (because), condition (if), time (when), and more.

Sorting the Conjunction Family

Can You Spot the Pattern?

Compare these three sentences. What is each connecting word doing differently?

(i) "She sings and dances." — joins two equal actions.

(ii) "Wait until I return." — one clause cannot stand fully independent of the other.

(iii) "Either you go or I do." — two words working as a linked, matching pair.

✓ Rule Unlocked

Conjunctions fall into three families:

- Coordinating conjunctions (**f**or, **a**nd, **n**or, **b**ut, **o**r, **y**et, so — remember 'FANBOYS') link elements of equal rank.
- Subordinating conjunctions (because, although, if, since, when, unless, while – remember BAISWUW) attach a dependent clause to a main clause.
- Correlative conjunctions (either-or, neither-nor, both-and, not only-but also, whether-or) work only in matched pairs and demand parallel structure on both sides — this is where most exam traps live.

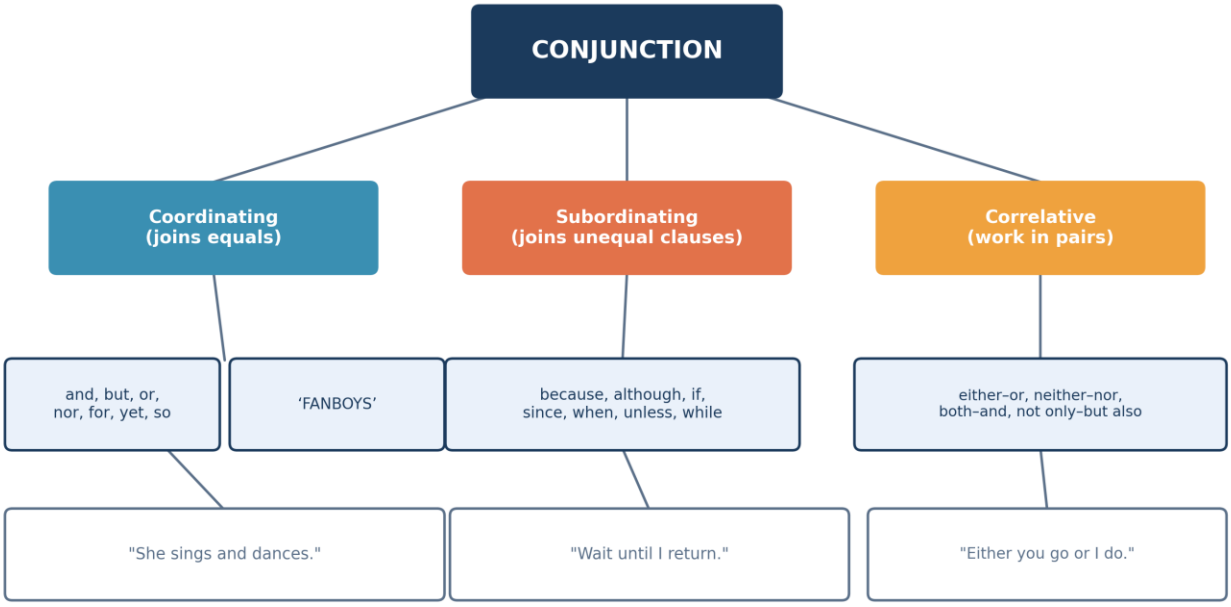

Figure 1: The Conjunction family tree

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Correlative Pairs Must Match

Can You Spot the Pattern?

Which of these feels balanced, and which feels lopsided?

(i) "He neither called nor he texted."

(ii) "He neither called nor texted."

✓ Rule Unlocked

Sentence (ii) wins — both halves after 'neither' and 'nor' are plain verbs. In a correlative pair, whatever grammatical form follows the first half (a verb, a noun, an adjective, a full clause) must follow the second half too. This single idea — parallelism — explains almost every correlative-conjunction question you will ever face.

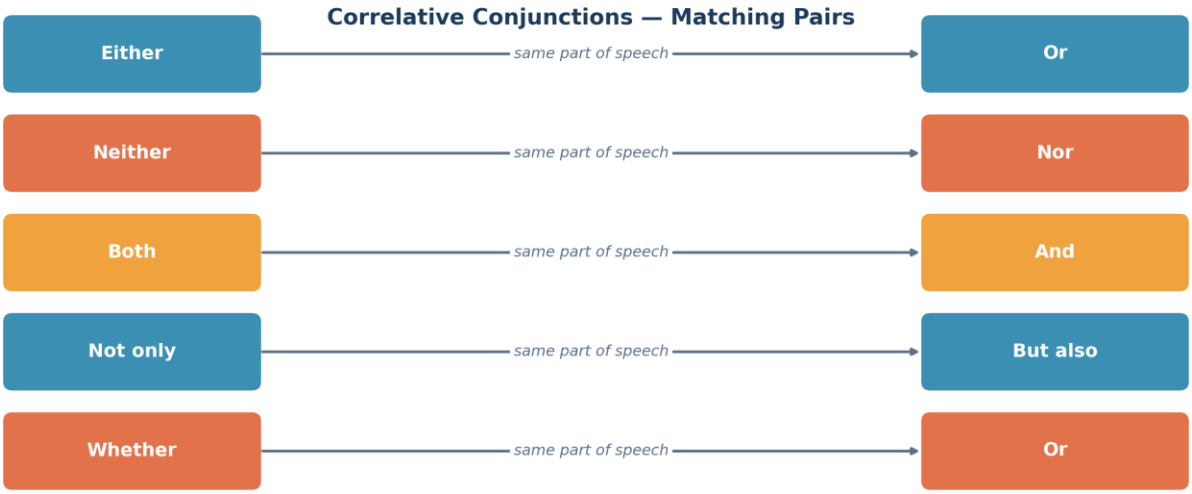

Figure 2: Correlative conjunctions always travel in matching pairs

✗ Notice This — Correlative Parallelism	
✗ He agreed neither to my proposal but also to his.	✓ He agreed neither to my proposal nor to his.
✗ He helps his mother not only by money but by other means too.	✓ He helps his mother not only by money but also by other means.
✗ She wondered whether to stay or leaving early.	✓ She wondered whether to stay or to leave early.

The Scarcely/Hardly – No Sooner Trap

Can You Spot the Pattern?

Read this aloud and notice where it snags:

"Scarcely had the train left the platform than I realised I'd left my bag behind."

✓ Rule Unlocked

That 'than' is the snag. 'Scarcely' and 'Hardly' are always completed by 'when' — never 'than'. Flip the pairing, and 'No sooner' is always completed by 'than' — never 'when'. Both structures also invert the auxiliary verb to the front of the sentence for emphasis: "Hardly had I…", "No sooner did he…".

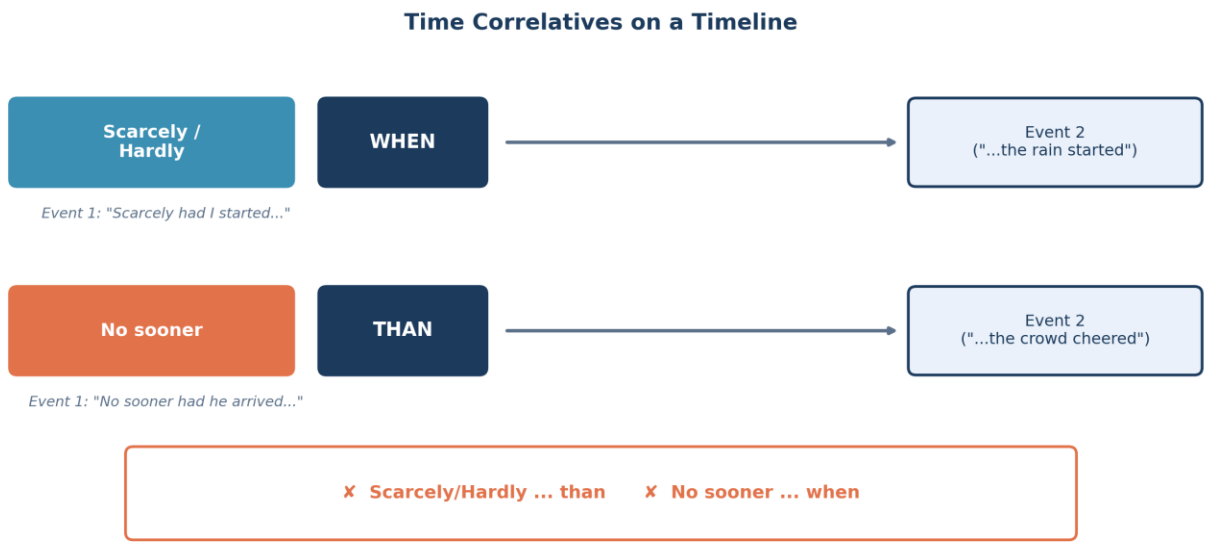

Figure 3: Two look-alike structures, two different partners

Seldom or Never, Seldom if Ever

Can You Spot the Pattern?

One of these is a genuine English idiom and one is an exam trap. Can you tell which?

(i) "He seldom or ever visits his hometown."
(ii) "He seldom or never visits his hometown."

✓ Rule Unlocked

Sentence (ii) is correct. 'Seldom or never' and 'seldom if ever' are both acceptable, idiomatic combinations — but 'seldom or ever' is always wrong, however natural it may sound when you read it quickly.

When 'Not Only' Meets Subject-Verb Agreement

Can You Spot the Pattern?

"Not only the players but also the coach was fined." Now flip the order: "Not only the coach but also the players were fined." Why does the verb change?

✓ Rule Unlocked

In either-or, neither-nor and not only-but also constructions, the verb agrees with whichever noun sits closer to it — not with the first noun mentioned. Move 'coach' next to the verb, and it takes 'was'; move 'players' next to the verb, and it takes 'were'.

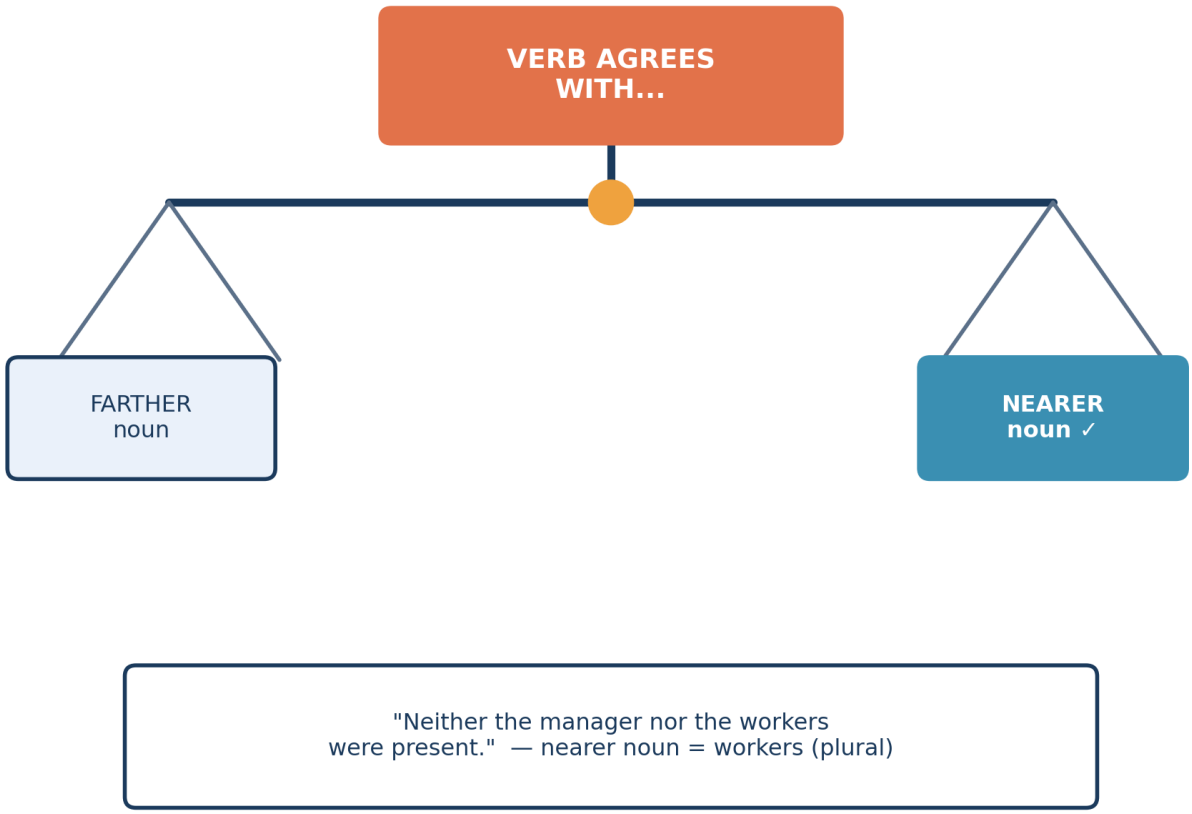

Figure 4: The verb always leans toward the nearer noun

'Such As' versus 'Such…That'

Can You Spot the Pattern?

(i) "He gave such gifts as chocolates and books."
(ii) "He gave such an expensive gift that everyone was stunned."

✓ Rule Unlocked

'Such as' introduces examples — it names a category. 'Such…that' shows a degree so extreme that it produces a consequence. Mixing them up is a classic, sneaky exam swap.

The Two Rules of 'Both'

Can You Spot the Pattern?

"Both Priya as well as Meera scored full marks." and "Both of them are not coming." — both sentences feel slightly off. Why?

✓ Rule Unlocked

'Both' pairs only with 'and', never 'as well as'. And because 'both' has an inherently positive, inclusive sense, it is never used in a negative sentence — switch to 'neither…nor' instead: "Neither of them is coming."

The Built-In-Negative Family: Unless, Lest, Suppose

Can You Spot the Pattern?

Three sentences, three quiet double-negatives — spot the repeated pattern:

(i) "Unless you don't hurry, you'll miss the bus."

(ii) "Walk carefully, lest you should not slip."

(iii) "Suppose if you fail, what next?"

✓ Rule Unlocked

'Unless' already means 'if not' — a second 'not' cancels the meaning you intended. 'Lest' already carries a negative sense and is always followed by 'should' alone (never 'should not'). And 'suppose', when it opens a command or request, is never followed by 'if' — the sentence is already conditional in spirit.

✗ Notice This — Unless / Lest / Suppose	
✗ Unless you don't hurry, you'll miss the bus.	✓ Unless you hurry, you'll miss the bus.
✗ Walk carefully, lest you should not slip.	✓ Walk carefully, lest you should slip.
✗ Suppose if you fail, what next?	✓ Suppose you fail, what next?

Different From, Other Than, Nothing Else But

Can You Spot the Pattern?

Three near-identical comparison words — three different correct partners. Read carefully:

(i) "His approach is different than mine."

(ii) "She had no other option except to resign."

(iii) "It's nothing else than carelessness."

✓ Rule Unlocked

After ‘different’, use ‘from’ — never ‘than’. After the comparative ‘other’, the only correct partner is ‘than’ — not ‘from’, ‘but’ or ‘except’. And ‘nothing else’ is completed by ‘but’, never ‘than’. Three look-alike words, three separate rules — worth learning as a set precisely because they get swapped with each other.

As If / As Though — the Imaginary World

Can You Spot the Pattern?

“He talks as if he owns the place.” Sounds fine in casual speech — but is it correct for a hypothetical that isn’t true?

✓ Rule Unlocked

When ‘as if’ or ‘as though’ introduces something imaginary, untrue or hypothetical, formal English avoids the present tense and uses the past subjunctive instead: “He talks as if he owned the place.” This is the Subjunctive Mood at work — the same logic you may already know from ‘If I were you…’

When ‘That’ Disappears

Can You Spot the Pattern?

(i) He said that, “I am ready.”
(ii) She asked that what time it was.

✓ Rule Unlocked

Both are wrong for the same reason: ‘that’ is dropped before a direct quotation (He said, “I am ready.”) and before an indirect interrogative clause (She asked what time it was). Whenever a question word — who, what, where, why, whether — already introduces the reported clause, ‘that’ becomes redundant and incorrect.

Though…Yet, Not Though…But

Can You Spot the Pattern?

“Though he is poor, but he is honest.” — read it slowly. Does it need both ‘though’ and ‘but’?

✓ Rule Unlocked

‘Though’ (or ‘although’) and ‘but’ both exist to set up a contrast — using them together says the same thing twice. The correlative of ‘though’ is ‘yet’ or simply a comma: “Though he is poor, yet he is honest.” or “Though he is poor, he is honest.” Never ‘though…but’ in the same sentence.

Putting It All Together

Notice what just happened across these twelve discoveries: you were not handed a wall of rules to memorise — you noticed a pattern, tested it against its opposite, and only then named the rule. That is exactly the instinct examiners are testing when they hide a conjunction error inside an otherwise fluent sentence. Trust the ear you have just trained — it is more reliable under exam pressure than any list.

Would You Assess Yourself as You Learn?

Time to test the instincts you've just built. Both sets below are freshly written, graduate-level items — the kind you'll meet in the actual exam, not textbook lookalikes. Give yourself 12 minutes per set, mark your answers on rough paper, and resist the urge to peek at Section 5 until you're done.

Set 1: Spotting Errors of Conjunction (15 questions)

Directions: Which part of the given sentence has an error? In case there is no error, choose option (d).

Q1. No sooner had the results been declared (a)/ when students rushed (b)/ to check their roll numbers online. (c)/ No error (d)

Q2. Scarcely had the officer entered the parade ground (a)/ than the cadets snapped (b)/ to attention immediately. (c)/ No error (d)

Q3. Not only the young recruits (a)/ but also their instructor (b)/ were exhausted after the drill. (c)/ No error (d)

Q4. Neither the volunteers nor the coordinator (a)/ was informed (b)/ about the change in venue. (c)/ No error (d)

Q5. Both discipline as well as dedication (a)/ are essential qualities (b)/ for a defence aspirant. (c)/ No error (d)

Q6. He behaves as if (a)/ he owns the entire mess hall (b)/ though he joined only last week. (c)/ No error (d)

Q7. The instructor said that he would not tolerate indiscipline (a)/ and that latecomers would be punished (b)/ irrespective of rank or seniority. (c)/ No error (d)

Q8. She asked the sentry that who had issued the order (a)/ to lock the gate (b)/ before sunset. (c)/ No error (d)

Q9. He has no other excuse (a)/ except laziness (b)/ for missing the physical training session. (c)/ No error (d)

Q10. It was nothing else than sheer determination (a)/ that helped him clear (b)/ the written examination on his third attempt. (c)/ No error (d)

Q11. Unless the candidates don't carry their admit cards (a)/ they will not be allowed (b)/ to enter the examination hall. (c)/ No error (d)

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Q12. Walk carefully on the obstacle course (a)/ lest you should not slip (b)/ and injure yourself. (c)/ No error (d)

Q13. Suppose if you fail the medical test (a)/ what alternative career (b)/ would you consider? (c)/ No error (d)

Q14. The training schedule this year is quite different (a)/ than the one followed (b)/ during the previous batch. (c)/ No error (d)

Q15. He seldom or ever discusses his rank (a)/ or his postings (b)/ with civilians outside the force. (c)/ No error (d)

Set 2: Spotting Errors of Conjunction (15 questions)

Directions: Which part of the given sentence has an error? In case there is no error, choose option (d).

Q1. Although the monsoon arrived late this year (a)/ but the reservoirs filled up quickly (b)/ once the rains intensified. (c)/ No error (d)

Q2. The library displayed such rare manuscripts (a)/ that scholars travelled from distant countries (b)/ just to view them. (c)/ No error (d)

Q3. The chef used such fresh ingredients (a)/ that included basil, saffron and truffle oil, (b)/ imported specially for the banquet. (c)/ No error (d)

Q4. Both the intern as well as her supervisor (a)/ submitted the quarterly report (b)/ two days before the deadline. (c)/ No error (d)

Q5. Neither the auditor nor the accountants (a)/ were satisfied (b)/ with the discrepancies in the ledger. (c)/ No error (d)

Q6. Hardly had the CEO finished her speech (a)/ than the shareholders began (b)/ raising pointed questions about the merger. (c)/ No error (d)

Q7. No sooner did the market open (a)/ when the stock prices (b)/ began to fluctuate wildly. (c)/ No error (d)

Q8. She looked at the abandoned house as though (a)/ it hides some forgotten secret (b)/ from decades ago. (c)/ No error (d)

Q9. The manager enquired that why the shipment (a)/ had been delayed (b)/ by nearly a week. (c)/ No error (d)

Q10. He has no other ambition from becoming (a)/ a published novelist (b)/ before he turns thirty. (c)/ No error (d)

Q11. It is nothing else but pure talent (a)/ combined with years of practice (b)/ that made her a champion. (c)/ No error (d)

Q12. Unless she doesn't finish the assignment tonight (a)/ she will have to explain herself (b)/ to the editor tomorrow. (c)/ No error (d)

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Q13. Drive slowly near the school zone (a)/ lest a child should not dart (b)/ across the road unexpectedly. (c)/ No error (d)

Q14. Suppose you missed your connecting flight, (a)/ what would be your (b)/ backup plan for reaching the venue? (c)/ No error (d)

Q15. The company's new pricing model is completely different (a)/ than the one used (b)/ by its closest competitor. (c)/ No error (d)

Check Your Target Learning Performance

Mark your answers honestly before reading further. For every question you got wrong, re-read the explanation twice — once for the rule, once for the sentence pattern that hid it.

Score yourself against the table below, then read every explanation — even for the ones you got right. Understanding why a 'No error' sentence is genuinely correct sharpens your instinct just as much as fixing a mistake does.

Score (per set of 15)	What it means
13–15 correct	Excellent command over conjunctions — fine-tune the few you missed and move on.
9–12 correct	Good grasp overall — revisit the specific discovery box tied to each miss.
5–8 correct	The core patterns need another pass — re-read Section 3 before attempting fresh sets.
Below 5	Slow down and rebuild rule by rule — use the 'Notice This' tables as quick daily drills.

Set 1 (Errors of Conjunction) — Answers & Explanations

Q	Ans	Explanation
1	(b)	'No sooner' is completed by 'than', not 'when'. Correct: "than students rushed".
2	(b)	'Scarcely' is completed by 'when', not 'than'. Correct: "when the cadets snapped".
3	(c)	In 'not only…but also', the verb agrees with the nearer noun 'instructor' (singular). Correct: "was exhausted".
4	(d)	No error. In 'neither…nor', the verb correctly agrees with the nearer, singular noun 'coordinator': "was informed".
5	(a)	'Both' takes 'and', never 'as well as'. Correct: "Both discipline and dedication".

Q	Ans	Explanation
6	(b)	After ‘as if’ describing a hypothetical/untrue idea, use the past subjunctive. Correct: “he owned the entire mess hall”.
7	(d)	No error. ‘That’ is correctly used to introduce two indirect statements (not interrogatives), so it is required, not dropped.
8	(a)	‘That’ is dropped before an indirect interrogative clause. Correct: “She asked the sentry who had issued the order…”.
9	(b)	After the comparative ‘other’, use ‘than’, not ‘except’. Correct: “no other excuse than laziness”.
10	(a)	‘Nothing else’ takes ‘but’, not ‘than’. Correct: “It was nothing else but sheer determination…”.
11	(a)	‘Unless’ already means ‘if not’; the extra ‘don’t’ double-negates. Correct: “Unless the candidates carry their admit cards…”.
12	(b)	‘Lest’ is negative in sense and cannot take ‘not’; it is followed by ‘should’ alone. Correct: “lest you should slip”.
13	(a)	‘Suppose’, opening a request/command, is not followed by ‘if’. Correct: “Suppose you fail the medical test…”.
14	(b)	After ‘different’, use ‘from’, not ‘than’. Correct: “from the one followed”.
15	(a)	‘Seldom or ever’ is always incorrect; use ‘seldom or never’ or ‘seldom if ever’. Correct: “He seldom or never discusses…”.

Set 2 (Errors of Conjunction) — Answers & Explanations

Q	Ans	Explanation
1	(b)	‘Although’ (or ‘though’) is not paired with ‘but’; use ‘yet’ or a comma. Correct: “…the reservoirs filled up quickly” (drop ‘but’).
2	(d)	No error. ‘Such…that’ is correctly used here to show a degree so remarkable it produced a consequence (scholars travelling).
3	(b)	To denote a category of examples, use ‘such…as’, not ‘such…that’. Correct: “such fresh ingredients as included…”.
4	(a)	‘Both’ takes ‘and’, not ‘as well as’. Correct: “Both the intern and her supervisor”.
5	(d)	No error. In ‘neither…nor’, the verb correctly agrees with the nearer, plural noun ‘accountants’: “were satisfied”.
6	(b)	‘Hardly’ is completed by ‘when’, not ‘than’. Correct: “when the shareholders began”.

Q	Ans	Explanation
7	**(b)**	'No sooner' is completed by 'than', not 'when'. Correct: "than the stock prices".
8	**(b)**	After 'as though' describing something untrue/hypothetical, use the past subjunctive. Correct: "it hid some forgotten secret".
9	**(a)**	'That' is dropped before an indirect interrogative clause. Correct: "The manager enquired why the shipment…".
10	**(a)**	After the comparative 'other', use 'than', not 'from'. Correct: "no other ambition than becoming".
11	**(d)**	No error. 'Nothing else but' is the correct, idiomatic combination.
12	**(a)**	'Unless' already means 'if not'; the extra 'doesn't' double-negates. Correct: "Unless she finishes the assignment tonight…".
13	**(b)**	'Lest' cannot take 'not'; it is followed by 'should' alone. Correct: "lest a child should dart".
14	**(d)**	No error. 'Suppose' correctly opens the sentence without being followed by 'if'.
15	**(b)**	After 'different', use 'from', not 'than'. Correct: "from the one used".

That's a wrap for this booklet — but not for your practice. Come back here whenever a rule feels shaky, and keep timing yourself until spotting the error takes less than thirty seconds a sentence.

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