Chapter 1

Tying Ideas Together with Conjunctions and Relative Pronouns

In This Chapter

▶ Getting to know different sentence parts and the conjunctions that hold them together

▶ Connecting phrases and clauses with coordinating conjunctions

▶ Forming sentences with subordinating conjunctions

▶ Joining sentences with relative pronouns

Conjunctions are the glue that connects parts of a sentence, such as clauses, phrases, or words, together to reach beyond basic sentence structure to form more sophisticated sentences. German uses two types of conjunctions: *coordinating conjunctions,* such as **oder** (*or*), and *subordinating conjunctions,* such as **weil** (*because*). Which type you use depends on the structure of the clauses, phrases, and words that you're joining together. In the first part of this chapter, you find out the difference between these two types of conjunctions, and then you discover how to use the most common German conjunctions to express your ideas clearly and intelligently.

Relative pronouns are another type of glue used to connect sentence parts. These words — *who, whose, whom, which,* and *that* — generally appear at the beginning of a relative clause, and they refer back to the noun or pronoun in the main clause. At the end of this chapter, you find out how to identify German relative pronouns and how to use them to link parts of a sentence together.

Conjunctions and Clauses: Reviewing the Terminology

Before you can master the art of using conjunctions , you need to get a handle on some basic grammatical vocab. You may already be familiar with many of the following terms, but here's a quick recap of the differences among phrases, clauses, and sentences — just in case you've forgotten:

- ✔ **Phrase:** A group of connected words that has neither a subject nor a verb, such as **nach Zürich** (*to Zürich*).

- ✔ **Clause:** A group of related words that has a subject and a verb, such as **Ich fliege** (*I'm flying*). Clauses come in several varieties:

  - • **Main clause (independent clause):** This clause can stand on its own; it has a sentence structure, as in **der Nachrichtensprecher war enttäuscht** (*the newscaster was disappointed*). This is just about the same as a sentence, except it doesn't have a proper beginning (a capitalized **D** in **der**) or a punctuation mark at the end (a period in this example).

  - • **Subordinate clause (dependent clause):** This clause has a sentence structure with a subject and a verb, but it can't stand on its own. It needs some help from its friends, the independent clause and the conjunction. If you see such a clause alone without a main clause — for example, **weil er seine Stimme verloren hat** (*because he lost his voice*) — you're left waiting to find out more information.

  - • **Relative clause (dependent clause):** This type of clause can't stand on its own even though it has a sentence structure with a subject and a verb. Relative clauses modify nouns or pronouns, as well as whole phrases. The modifying clause begins with a relative pronoun, such as *who, which,* or *that.* In English, the relative pronoun may be left out; that's not the case in German. For example, **Wo ist das Hotel, das er uns empfohlen hat?** (*Where's the hotel [that] he recommended us?*) The second **das** in the sentence is the relative pronoun **das** (*that*).

- ✔ **Sentence:** A group of words that has it all: a subject, a verb, a capital letter at the beginning, and an ending like a period, exclamation point, or question mark. In other words, a sentence is the whole shebang. For example, **Ich fliege nächste Woche nach Zürich.** (*I'm flying to Zürich next week.*)

Conjunctions are the connectors, the cement, the super glue that you use to combine sentence parts. Here are the two types of conjunctions:

✔ **Coordinating:** A coordinating conjunction joins main clauses, phrases, or words. For example:

> **Der Nachrichtensprecher hat seine Stimme verloren, und er musste zu Hause bleiben.** (*The newscaster lost his voice, and he had to stay home.*) The coordinating conjunction **und** (*and*) combines the two main clauses; a comma placed before **und** separates the two clauses.

> **Martin ging nach Hause und machte sich ein Käsebrot zum Abendessen.** (*Martin went home and made [himself] a cheese sandwich for supper.*) **Und** (*and*) is a coordinating conjunction; it combines two actions (verbs) that Martin did.

✔ **Subordinating:** This type of conjunction introduces a subordinate clause and relates it to another clause in the sentence. For example:

> **Der Nachrichtensprecher war enttäuscht, weil er seine Stimme verloren hat.** (*The newscaster was disappointed because he lost his voice.*) **Weil** (*because*) is the subordinating conjunction. The subordinate clause **weil er seine Stimme verloren hat** (*because he lost his voice*) has complete meaning when it's connected to **der Nachrichtensprecher war enttäuscht** (*the newscaster was disappointed*).

> **Martin ging nach Hause, obwohl er sehr einsam war.** (*Martin went home, although he was very lonely.*) The subordinating conjunction **obwohl** (*although*) introduces the subordinate clause that follows it and connects the two parts of the sentence — **Martin ging nach Hause** and **er sehr einsam war.**

In English, conjunctions such as *and, because, but, or,* and *when* are simple to use in a sentence; the word order comes naturally for fluent speakers. Using German conjunctions correctly, however, requires a conscious effort on your part to keep in mind which type of conjunction you're dealing with and how to get the word order straight. You also need to remember the comma. Keep reading to find out how to correctly use these two types of conjunctions.

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Connecting with Coordinating Conjunctions

The *coordinating conjunctions,* the ones that join main clauses, phrases, or words, are the easier of the two types to master. The number of German coordinating conjunctions is small, and they correspond well to their English counterparts in meaning and usage — except for a few easy-to-understand differences.

Table 1-1 shows the common coordinating conjunctions, along with their English equivalents and comments related to how you use them in a sentence.

Note: In German, you don't use a comma in front of **und** in a series (or list of words), although this practice is common in English. Example: **Wir haben Kartoffelbrei, Spinat und Kabeljau gegessen.** (*We ate mashed potatoes, spinach, and cod.*)

Table 1-1	Common Coordinating Conjunctions		
German	*English Equivalent*	*Does a Comma Separate Joined Sentence Parts?*	*Comment*
aber	*but*	yes	Used the same way in English.
denn	*for, because*	yes	**Denn** is also used as a flavoring particle, often to interest the listener; **weil,** a subordinating conjunction, also means *because,* but it has a different word order.
oder	*or*	no (unless the writer chooses a comma for clarity)	Used the same way in English.
sondern	*but (rather)*	yes	Used to express *on the contrary, rather,* or *instead;* it's preceded by a clause that makes a negative statement.
und	*and*	no (unless the writer chooses a comma for clarity)	Used the same way in English.

Using coordinating conjunctions

Incorporating coordinating conjunctions into your writing and speech isn't too difficult. You just combine two sentence parts by using the coordinating conjunction that fits what you intend to say about the relationship between them.

Keep in mind that in German, **oder** and **und** don't need a comma preceding them, although you can use a comma to improve clarity. On the other hand, **aber, sondern,** and **denn** do require a preceding comma to connect clauses, phrases, and words. Here are some examples:

> **Ich gehe zur Bank, denn ich brauche Geld.** (*I'm going to the bank because I need some money.*)

> **Esssen wir heute Abend bei dir oder bei mir?** (*Are we having dinner at your place or my place tonight?*)

> **Heute esse ich ein saftiges Steak im Restaurant oder ich mache Spaghetti zu Hause.** (*Today I'll have a juicy steak in a restaurant, or I'll make spaghetti at home.*)

Sondern and **aber** both mean *but;* however, their uses differ. You use **sondern** to express *but rather* in cases where the first clause has a negative expression and where the two ideas cancel each other. For example:

> **Ich wohne nicht in der Stadmitte, sondern am Stadtrand.** (*I live not downtown but [rather] on the outskirts of the city.*)

The main clause in the beginning (**Ich wohne nicht in der Stadmitte**) contains a negative, **nicht,** and the two ideas are mutually exclusive. **Sondern** links the prepositional phrase **am Stadtrand** to the rest of the sentence. You use **aber** in the same manner as in English — to connect two ideas that aren't mutually exclusive. The following sentences show you how to use the coordinating conjunctions **sondern** and **aber:**

> **Ich möchte gern ins Theater gehen, aber ich habe kein Geld.** (*I'd really like to go to the theater, but I don't have any money.*)

> **Ich fliege nicht am Samstag, sondern am Sonntag.** (*I'm flying not on Saturday but rather on Sunday.*)

> **Der Film hatte nicht nur gute Schauspieler, sondern auch hervorragende Musik.** (*The movie had not only good actors but also excellent music.*)

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Working on word order

When you form German sentences with coordinating conjunctions, the separate sentence parts maintain their word order. For both English and German, the standard word order looks like this: Take the subject + the verb + additional information, like an object or a prepositional phrase, and then add the conjunction to combine the other sentence part. (Keep in mind that in German, the active, conjugated verb always goes in the second position.) Now you have two parts combined into one sentence:

> **Luca geht ins Kaufhaus, aber sein Hund bleibt zu Hause.** (*Luca goes to the department store, but his dog stays home.*) **Aber** (*but*) is the coordinating conjunction.

Although the preceding word order is exactly the same in English and German, that's not always the case. Other German sentences using a coordinating conjunction have a different word order from the standard subject + verb + other information structure. (Go to Book III, Chapter 1 for more on word order.)

For example, in sentences where *time expressions* (descriptions of time, such as *this morning, in the eighteenth century, at five o'clock,* and so on) take the place of the subject, the verb is still in second position, but the subject goes behind the verb. Here's what this word order change looks like:

> **Wir fahren heute mit dem Zug nach Hamburg, denn morgen früh möchten wir zum Fischmarkt gehen.** (*We're taking the train to Hamburg today because tomorrow morning we'd like to go to the fish market.*) The time expression **morgen früh** immediately follows the coordinating conjunction **denn.**

This change in word order is important because it distinguishes coordinating conjunctions from their cousins, the subordinating conjunctions. (See the later section "Using subordinating conjunctions" for details on the differences between these two types of conjunctions.)

When you want to add more detail to a German sentence (as part of the "additional information" that comes after the subject and verb), remember the mantra *time, cause, manner, place.* This mantra reminds you how to position information that describes when, why, how, and where. The standard word order is

1. Time (tells when)

2. Cause (tells why)

3. Manner (tells how)

4. Place (tells where)

Take a look at the enhancement to the example sentence from earlier in this section:

> **Wir fahren heute wegen des Fischmarkts mit dem Zug nach Hamburg, denn schon um 5 Uhr in der Früh beginnt der Fischmarkt.** (*We're taking the train to Hamburg today because of the fish market, for the market opens already at 5 a.m.*)

In the first clause, **heute** = time, **wegen des Fischmarkts** = cause, **mit dem Zug** = manner, and **nach Hamburg** = place. In the second clause, **schon um 5 Uhr in der Früh** describes time and is in first place in front of the verb.

The following sentences demonstrate German word order with the coordinating conjunctions **und, aber,** and **denn:**

> **Ich möchte schwimmen, aber das Wasser ist zu kalt.** (*I'd like to go swimming, but the water is too cold.*)

> **Kai hat zwei Brüder und Stefanie hat drei Schwestern.** (*Kai has two brothers, and Stefanie has three sisters.*)

> **Sven ist sehr intelligent, aber er ist nicht amüsant.** (*Sven is very intelligent, but he is not amusing.*)

> **Heike und Georg wohnen in einem sehr kleinen Haus, aber sie sind glücklich darin.** (*Heike and Georg live in a very small house, but they're happy in it.*)

> **Heute arbeite ich nicht, denn ich habe eine Erkältung.** (*I'm not working today because I have a cold.*)

Getting Support from Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions are a little trickier to use than their coordinating cousins, but that's partly because there are more of them to keep straight. As long as you follow the guidelines covered in this section, you'll be able to use subordinating conjunctions in German as well as (or maybe even better than) you do in English.

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Table 1-2 presents a list of commonly used German subordinating conjunctions with their English equivalents and comments on their usage.

Table 1-2	Common Subordinating Conjunctions	
German	*English Equivalent*	*Comment*
als	*as, when*	Describes an event in the past. Example: **Als ich elf Jahre alt war . . .** (*When I was eleven . . .*)
bevor	*before*	Used the same way in English
da	*since (inasmuch as)*	Not to be confused with the preposition **seit** (*since* + a point in time) or **da** (*there*)
damit	*so that*	Used to express *in order that . . .;* not to be confused with **damit,** a compound of **da + mit** to express with *that/it/them*
dass	*that*	Rarely begins a sentence; in English, you can leave out the conjunction *that,* but you can't in German. Example: **Ich wusste, dass er krank war . . .** (*I knew [that] he was sick . . .*)
falls	*in case*	Used to describe *in the situation/event that . . .*
ob	*if, whether*	Not interchangeable with **wenn; ob** can be used to begin an indirect yes/no question
obwohl	*although*	Used the same way in English
weil	*because*	Same meaning as **denn** (coordinating conjunction) but with a different word order in the subordinate clause
wenn	*if, when, whenever*	Not interchangeable with **ob; wenn** starts a clause that stipulates the condition of something possibly happening or not, such as *if A, then B*

Using subordinating conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions have some similarities to coordinating conjunctions: Both types of conjunctions link ideas together, both introduce one of the ideas, and both generally use commas to separate the two ideas. The distinguishing characteristics of subordinating conjunctions are as follows:

- ✔ A subordinating conjunction begins a subordinate clause. **Ich hoffe, dass du kommst.** (*I hope that you come.*) **Dass** is the subordinating conjunction, and the subordinate clause is **dass du kommst.**

- ✔ A comma always separates the main clause from the subordinate clause. **Ich hoffe** (main clause) + **,** (comma) + **dass . . .** (subordinate clause).

- ✔ Subordinating conjunctions affect word order of verbs. They push the conjugated (main) verb to the end of the subordinate clause.

Als and **wenn** have similar meanings; they can both mean *when*. However, **als** describes a single event in the past, and **wenn** functions the way it does in English — to describe an action that's repeated in any verb tense. Here are two examples to help you keep these two conjunctions straight:

> **Als ich in der Stadt lebte, hatte ich kein Auto.** (*When I lived in the city, I didn't have a car.*) You don't live in the city anymore; that event is over.

> **Wenn ich nicht mehr arbeite, möchte ich noch fit bleiben.** (*When I'm no longer working, I'd like to stay in shape.*) This sentence is in present tense; it describes an imagined scenario in the future.

Ob and **wenn** are similar because they can both mean *if*. However, **ob** can begin an indirect yes/no question, and **wenn** starts a clause that stipulates the condition of something possibly happening or not. **Falls** and **wenn** are also similar. **Falls** can be used in such situations when you want to express *in case* or *in the case that*. Consider these examples:

> **Ich weiß nicht, ob das richtig ist.** (*I don't know if that's right.*) You're posing a question to yourself that would have a yes/no answer.

> **Wenn/Falls es morgen regnet, bleiben wir zu Hause.** (*If/In case it rains tomorrow, we'll stay home.*)

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Look at the following examples of how you use **da, bevor,** and **damit** in German sentences. You find example sentences with **dass, obwohl,** and **weil** in the next section.

> **Da ich wenig Geld habe, hoffe ich einen reichen Partner zu finden.** (*Since I have little money, I hope to find a rich partner.*) You can also use **weil** in place of **da** in this sentence when you want to express *because.*

> **Bevor ich den richtigen Mann finde, werde ich meine Freiheit genießen.** (*Before I find the right man, I'll enjoy my freedom.*)

> **Ich brauche viel Geld, damit ich Luxusartikeln kaufen kann.** (*I need a lot of money so I can buy luxury goods.*)

Putting words in the proper order

Clarity is the name of the game when you're using subordinating conjunctions. To achieve that clarity, you need to make sure you put everything in its proper order:

- ✔ Throw the conjugated verb to the end of the subordinate clause, as in **Ich hoffe, dass sie das Basketballspiel gewinnen.** (*I hope [that] they win the basketball game.*) The verb **gewinnen** (*win*) is at the end of the subordinate clause, which begins with the word **dass. Dass** very rarely begins a sentence.

- ✔ When a subordinate clause begins a sentence, place the conjugated verb of the main clause directly following the subordinate clause. Why? Because the whole subordinate clause counts as one sentence element (one unit), the verb in the main clause is in its usual second position: **Wenn ich zu spät aufstehe, verpasse ich den Zug.** (*When I get up too late, I miss the train.*) The verb **verpasse** (*miss,* as in *to miss an opportunity*) directly follows the subordinate clause.

Look at the annotated examples of three sentences that use subordinating conjunctions:

> **Ich hoffe, dass sie das Basketballspiel gewinnen.** (*I hope [that] they win the basketball game.*) The main clause comes first, followed by the subordinate clause.

> 1. **Ich hoffe** (*I hope*) = main clause
>
> 2. **dass** (*that*) = subordinating conjunction introducing the subordinate clause
>
> 3. **sie** (*they*) = subject

   4. **das Basketballspiel** (*the basketball game*) = direct object, in accusative case

   5. **gewinnen** (*win*) = verb at the end of the subordinate clause

Obwohl ich oft zu spät aufstehe, erreiche ich den Zug. (*Although I often get up too late, I catch the train.*) The subordinate clause comes first, followed by the main clause.

   1. **Obwohl** (*although*) = subordinating conjunction introducing the sentence

   2. **ich oft zu spät** (*I often too late*) = subject and other information

   3. **aufstehe** (*get up*) = verb at the end of the subordinate clause

   4. **erreiche** (*catch*) = verb at the beginning of the independent clause (counts as second position in the sentence)

   5. **ich den Zug** (*I the train*) = subject and direct object, in accusative case

Weil ich viel zu spät aufgestanden bin, habe ich den Zug verpasst. (*Because I [have gotten] got up much too late, I [have] missed the train.*) The subordinate clause comes first, with the main clause in second position; both clauses use the present perfect verb tense (see Book IV, Chapter 4 for more on the present perfect). In the subordinate clause, the two verb parts are at the end of the clause, with the past participle (**aufgestanden**) preceding the conjugated verb (**bin**). In the main clause (**habe ich den Zug verpasst**), the word order of the verbs follows that of present perfect in a sentence with only one clause: The conjugated verb is in second position (**habe**), and the past participle is at the end of the clause/sentence. Remember that the whole subordinate clause functions as a subject, or as one unit of information, with a comma separating the two clauses. The conjugated verb is, grammatically speaking, in second position.

   1. **Weil** (*because*) = subordinating conjunction introducing the sentence

   2. **ich zu spät** (*I too late*) = subject and other information

   3. **aufgestanden** (*got up*) = past participle of **aufstehen** (*to get up*)

   4. **bin** (*have;* Literally: *am*) = conjugated verb thrown to the end of the subordinate clause so it follows the past participle **aufgestanden** (*got up*)

   5. **habe** (*have*) = conjugated verb at the beginning of the main clause

   6. **ich den Zug** (*I the train*) = subject and direct object, in accusative case

   7. **verpasst** (*missed*) = past participle of **verpassen** (*to miss*)

The following sentences show how word order plays out with the subordinating conjunction **dass:**

> **Ich weiss, dass Sie gut Deutsch sprechen.** (*I know that you speak good German.*)

> **Ich möchte, dass du morgen mit mir kommst.** (*I'd like you to come with me tomorrow.* Literally: *I would like that you come with me tomorrow.*)

> **Es ist gut, dass er am Freitag Zeit hat.** (*It's good that he has time on Friday.*)

> **Wir möchten, dass sie den Vertrag unterschreiben.** (*We want them to sign the contract.* Literally: *We would like that they sign the contract.*)

> **Es ist nicht gut, dass Norbert heute Abend allein ist.** (*It's not good that Norbert's alone tonight.*)

Joining with Relative Pronouns

When you want to include more information in a sentence than just a subject, verb, and possibly an object, you may need the help of a relative clause, which uses a relative pronoun (like *who, whom, which,* or *that*) to link two sentence parts. (For more information on relative pronouns, refer to Book III, Chapter 2.) This section explains what the German relative pronouns look like, how they differ from their English counterparts, and how to use them in sentences.

Knowing how to make the connection with relative pronouns

The most important factors that determine which form of the German relative pronoun to use are gender and case. For your reference, Table 1-3 shows the breakdown of the relative pronouns by gender and case. Remember that these relative pronouns can mean *who, whom, whose, which,* or *that* in English.

Table 1-3	Relative Pronouns			
Gender/Number of Noun Being Replaced	*Nominative Case*	*Accusative Case*	*Dative Case*	*Genitive Case*
Masculine (m.)	**der**	**den**	**dem**	**dessen**
Feminine (f.)	**die**	**die**	**der**	**deren**
Neuter (n.)	**das**	**das**	**dem**	**dessen**
Plural (pl.)	**die**	**die**	**denen**	**deren**

As Table 1-3 shows, the German relative pronouns take a number of different forms, depending on their function in the relative clause. To form a relative clause, keep in mind the following points:

✔ Relative clauses need a relative pronoun; English doesn't always use a relative pronoun.

✔ Relative clauses are set off by commas; English doesn't always need commas.

✔ Selecting the correct form of the relative pronoun depends on gender, number, and case. In English, you only have case with *who, whom,* and *whose.*

✔ The information preceding the relative clause determines the gender and number of the relative pronoun. In English, you aren't concerned with either gender or number.

✔ The relative pronoun's case is determined by its function in the relative clause. The same thing goes for English with *who, whom,* and *whose.*

Forming sentences with relative clauses

When you know the details of how relative pronouns work, you're ready to form your own sentences with relative clauses. Look at the following two short sentences that both have to do with **der Mann** (*the man*):

> **Das ist der Mann. Ich habe gestern mit ihm gesprochen.** (*That is the man. I spoke with him yesterday.*)

To put these two bits of information together into a single sentence, you use the corresponding relative pronoun that links the two sentences. The resulting single sentence with a relative clause sounds more natural than the two short sentences:

> **Das ist der Mann, mit dem ich gestern gesprochen habe.** (*That is the man [that] I spoke to yesterday.*) The relative clause begins with **mit dem** (*with whom*). **Dem** refers to **der Mann,** so it's singular, and it's dative because it's connected to the dative preposition **mit** (*with*). The more formal-sounding English equivalent of the sentence looks like this: *That is the man with whom I spoke yesterday.*

The following example sentences each have a relative clause. After the English translation, you see an explanation for the relative pronoun used in the sentence. As you look at the sentences, notice that the relative clause directly follows the noun to which it refers.

> **Das ist die Frau, in deren Frühstückspension wir übernachten.** (*That's the woman whose bed and breakfast we're staying at.*) The relative pronoun **deren** is in the genitive case, and it's feminine singular.

> **Ich habe einen Freund, dessen Sohn in Kiev lebt.** (*I have a friend whose son lives in Kiev.*) The relative pronoun **dessen** is in the genitive case, and it's masculine singular.

> **Das Auto, das ich kaufen möchte, kostet mehr als \$50,000.** (*The car [that] I want to buy costs more than \$50,000.*) **Das** is a singular, neuter relative pronoun, and it's in the accusative case. The relative clause interrupts the main clause to modify **Das Auto.**

> **Das Holz, aus dem dieser Schreibtisch gemacht wurde, stammt aus Indonesien.** (*The wood that this desk was made of comes from Indonesia.*) **Dem** is a singular, neuter pronoun, and it's in the dative case. The relative clause interrupts the main clause to modify **Das Holz.**

> **Kennst du Männer, die Frauennamen haben?** (*Do you know [any] men who have women's names?*) The relative pronoun **die** is in the nominative case, and it's plural.

> **Wie finden Sie die Musik, die diese Gruppe spielt?** (*What do you think of the music [that] this band is playing?*) The relative pronoun is the second **die,** the one that follows the comma. **Die** is feminine singular, and it's in the accusative case.

> **Der grosse Hund, der gerade bellt, hat mich letzte Woche gebissen.** (*The big dog that is barking right now bit me last week.*) The relative pronoun **der** is masculine, singular, and it's in the nominative case.

> **Es gibt viele Länder, denen wir mehr Entwicklungshilfe geben sollten.** (*There are many countries to whom we should give more economic aid.*) The relative pronoun **denen** is in the dative case, and it's plural.