

Chapter 15 Stop, Pause, Consider: The Role of Punctuation

Additional information and practice

Compound verb phrases, clause-combining, and punctuation

Consider the following sentences. In (1), the conjunction *and* connects two clauses, and it works perfectly. In (2), trying to use *for* as the conjunction doesn't quite work, but in (3), we have a grammatical sentence using *for*.

- (1) I found the river and saw a beautiful cottage.
- (2) *I went to the forest for wanted to see the river.
- (3) I went to the forest for to see the river.

We can easily join two verb phrases using the coordinator *and*, which we often do. Here, the coordination is not two sentences (i.e., independent clauses), but, rather, two VPs, as (1) demonstrates. Both VPs (“found” and “saw”) share the subject *I*. Additionally, *saw a beautiful cottage* cannot stand on its own; it is not an independent clause, so it must be connected to the subject *I*. This is a simple test to determine whether you need the comma or not when joining clauses using a coordinating conjunction.

In (2), however, we cannot join the two clauses making them share the same subject unless we omit the second verb *wanted*. Even when we find a way to form the compound verb phrase that allows us to keep the coordinating conjunction *for* as in example (3), the result sounds odd. In fact, this *for to* construction is an archaic English form called the *for to* infinitive that remains in older hymns and folk songs and still exists in dialects such as Appalachian and

West Texas. For example, we can still hear people saying such sentences as the following: *I want for to meet them*¹. The construction continues to be used by many US speakers.

¹ see Henry, A. (1995) cited in Kaplan, A., Scruton, E., & Wood, J. (2017). For to infinitives. *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://vgdp.yale.edu/phenomena/for-to-infinitives>. Accessed on 2025-04-07). Updated by Katie Martin (2018)