

89 Ellipsis

Some words can be left out of a sentence to avoid repetition, or when the meaning can be understood without them. This is called ellipsis.

See also:

Question words 35

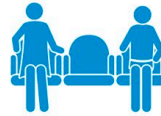
Coordinating conjunctions 110

89.1 ELLIPSIS AFTER CONJUNCTIONS

When two phrases are joined by “and,” “but,” or “or” it is common to leave out repeated words of various kinds.

He bought tickets, **but** [he] didn't go.

Often a repeated subject is dropped after “and,” “but,” or “or.”



She loved the original **and** [she loved] the sequel.

If the meaning remains clear, a repeated subject and verb can be dropped.



I'm happy to go out **or** [I'm happy to] stay home.

If the meaning is clear, words that have already been mentioned and do not require repetition can be omitted.



TIP

Ellipsis is not normally possible after conjunctions other than “and,” “but,” and “or.”

FURTHER EXAMPLES

She said she'd call, **but** she didn't [call].



I hope my camera works, **but** I don't think it will [work].



You can watch the documentary **or** [you can watch] the cartoon.



Please may I have a knife **and** [a] fork?



I'd love to be a boxer, **but** I'm not strong enough [to be a boxer].



I can't decide if I want a burger **or** [I want] a hotdog.



89.2 CONVERSATIONAL ELLIPSIS

Words can also be left out of sentences if the meaning can be understood from the context. This kind of ellipsis does not have strict rules, and is very common in informal everyday speech, particularly when giving replies.

What time does the movie start?



Eight.

[It starts at eight o'clock.]

What kind of popcorn would you like?



Salted, please.

[I would like salted popcorn, please.]

What did you think of the film?



Complete nonsense.

[I thought the film was complete nonsense.]

89.3 QUESTION WORD CLAUSES

Clauses can be dropped after question words such as “who,” “what,” “where,” and “how.”

Somebody stole my watch, but I don't know **who** [stole it].



I want to buy my dad a present, but I'm not sure **what** [to buy him].



I want to go away, but I can't decide **where** [to go].



I need to fix my car, and I'm fairly certain I know **how** [to fix it].

