Little Words That Join Sentences: And, But and Or in Year 1 Writing

In Year 1, children learn three little words that help them join simple ideas together when they write. 'And', 'but' and 'or' are joining words—or conjunctions—that turn two short sentences into one longer one. Learning to use them helps children write more interesting sentences and express their ideas more clearly.

What these joining words do

Your child is learning to use three small but mighty words: 'and', 'but' and 'or'. These are joining words—sometimes called conjunctions—that connect two simple ideas into one sentence. 'And' adds an extra idea: 'I like dogs and I like cats.' 'But' shows a contrast: 'I like ice cream but it makes me cold.' 'Or' offers a choice: 'Do you want juice or water?' Learning to spot and use these words helps children move beyond single short sentences and start building more interesting, longer ones. It's a natural step in learning to write.

What your child does at school

In Year 1, teachers make joining words concrete and playful. Children might use sentence strips—cards with words printed on them—and physically push them together to see how joining words connect ideas. They spot 'and', 'but' and 'or' in the stories they read aloud together. They work out which word makes sense in different sentences, and they try writing their own joined sentences with support. The teacher might model how two simple sentences become one longer sentence, showing the children how these little words do the joining work. It's hands-on, visual and fun rather than formal grammar rules.

What this means for your child's writing

Learning to join sentences is a big step forward. It means your child is moving beyond 'I went to the park. I played. I had lunch.' and starting to write longer sentences like 'I went to the park and I played, but then I had to leave.' Joined sentences help them share more of their ideas in fewer words. It's not about getting grammar perfectly right—it's about discovering that these little joining words are tools they can use to say more. Some children will use them confidently straightaway; others will need more practice. Every child develops at their own pace, and that's completely normal.

How you can help at home

The best help is playful and everyday. Chat with your child naturally: 'Would you like a snack or a drink?' or 'We can play outside and then read a story, but only if you put your shoes on first.' As you talk, you're using these words naturally and your child hears them. When you read stories together, point out the joining words gently: 'Look, it says "and"—that joins those two ideas together.' Keep a notepad nearby and, if your child feels like it, let them dictate a sentence or two about their day, and write it down with the joining words included. Celebrate their attempts without correcting them—the confidence matters more than perfection at this stage.

Questions parents often ask

Is my child too young for grammar? Not at all. Young children learn these concepts best through doing and speaking, not rules. They spot the words in stories, play with them on sentence cards, and hear them in everyday chat—that's enough. Should I correct them if they use the wrong joining word? Not in conversation—that discourages them. If they write something, you can gently model the right word back: if they write 'I like apples or I like bananas', you might say 'Yes, apples or bananas—you get to choose one.' Will they really understand this? Many will straightaway, and those who don't yet will when they're ready. It all builds; nothing is wasted.

Sources

- Department for Education, 'National Curriculum in England: English Programmes of Study (Key Stage 1)'