

sondern versus *aber*

The words *sondern* and *aber* are both coordinating conjunctions. This means that they both join two main clauses and have no effect on the word order of either clause. Both *sondern* and *aber* remain outside of the word fields of either of the two joined clauses.

| | | | |
|-------------|---|-------------------------------|-------------|
| verb 2nd | , | <i>sondern</i> <i>aber</i> | verb 2nd |
|-------------|---|-------------------------------|-------------|

aber

The conjunction *aber* indicates a contrast, but has no implication of exclusion. The word *aber* is often translated into English as *but*, *however*, *nonetheless*, and it highlights that some feature in the second clause is different from one of the features in the first clause. The contrasted elements are printed in blue.

Es ist jetzt **Winter**, *aber* die Tage sind **warm**.
It is winter now, but the days are warm.

Der Anzug war etwas **alt**, *aber* er sah noch **schön** aus.
The suit was somewhat old, but it still looked nice.

Meine Bekannten **wollten** mich **abholen**, *aber* ich **war** schon **weggefahren**.
My friends were going to pick me up, but I had already left.

Inge **geht** jeden Abend mit dem Hund **spazieren**, *aber* ihr Freund **bleibt** lieber **zu Hause**.
Inge takes the dog for a walk every night, but her boyfriend prefers to stay home.

sondern

The conjunction *sondern* indicates a contrast where there is a direct contradiction between two contrasted features. The contrast indicated by *sondern* shows mutual exclusion. “*It is not A, rather it is B.*” In constructions with *sondern*, the first clause typically contains a negating element such as *nicht*, *nie*, *kein*. The negating element directly precedes the portion of the sentence being contrasted. The word *sondern* is often translated into English as *rather*, *on the contrary*, *but instead*. If the contrast in English is clear, then it is possible to omit any conjunction joining the two contrasting ideas. The contrasted elements are printed in blue.

Das sind **keine Geranien**, *sondern* sie sind **Chrysanthemen**.
Those are not geraniums (rather) they are chrysanthemums.

Die Fahrt nach Südamerika **wird nicht billig sein**, *sondern* sie **wird** uns **sehr viel kosten**.
The trip to South America will not be cheap, on the contrary, it's going to cost us quite a bit.

Die Familie ist **nie ins Gebirge** gefahren, *sondern* sie hat Urlaub immer **am Strand** gemacht.
The family never traveled to the mountains, but instead they always took their vacation at the beach.

Wir frühstücken heute **nicht alleine**, *sondern* wir essen mit den Nachbarn **zusammen**.
We're not having breakfast alone today, rather we're eating together with the neighbors.

Du kannst **nicht zu Fuß** dahingehen, *sondern* du musst **mit dem Bus** fahren.
You can't get there on foot, you have to take the bus.