

Connecting ideas in writing

How to connect ideas at the sentence and paragraph level in academic writing

In academic writing, it is important to present an argument clearly and cohesively. In addition, you may be required to discuss and evaluate existing research or ideas about the topic under discussion. Often you will be assessed on your ability to do both.

Developing the language to connect ideas in academic writing will help you with both these tasks. The appropriate use of 'discourse markers,' that is, words or phrases that signal a relationship, can reveal and reinforce the direction that your argument is taking, and make clear the relations between sections of your writing.

Experienced writers use these special connecting words or phrases to bridge gaps between ideas that may at first seem unrelated.

This flyer provides some suggestions for sentence openers, 'linking words' within sentences and between paragraphs, and alternative vocabulary choices you might use when connecting ideas in writing. For more information on other writing skills, see the Academic Skills booklet *Tertiary Essay Writing*.

Connectives used in and between sentences

Connectives allow us to be more precise about the relationships between statements in a sentence or between sentences. Particular phrases and words serve different functions in connecting ideas and arguments. For example, different clauses or words can signal or 'signpost' additional or similar information, opposition or contrast, concession, cause or effect, emphasis, clarification, or a relationship in time or sequence.

Some useful examples of each are categorised by function in the following section. Note that most of these terms can also be used to start new paragraphs. However, some of them need to be incorporated into fuller sentences to be effective as paragraph openers.

For example, if you use *notwithstanding* as a paragraph opener you may have to add other words to provide

more information such as
"Notwithstanding a lack of natural resources, the region has ..."

Addition – to add an idea

additionally, and, also, apart from this, as well (as), in addition, moreover, further, furthermore, too

Condition – to provide a condition

if, in that case, provided that, unless

For comparison – to show how things are similar

correspondingly, equally, for the same reason, in a similar manner, in comparison, in the same way, on the one hand, similarly, too

For contrast – to show how things are different

alternatively, although, but, conversely, despite, even so, even though, however, in contrast, in spite of, instead, on the contrary, contrary to, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, on the other hand, rather, still, though, yet, whereas, while.

For emphasis – to put forward an idea more forcefully

again, in fact, interestingly, indeed, it should be noted (that), more important(ly), most importantly, to repeat, (un)fortunately, unquestionably

For illustration – to provide examples

a further instance of this is..., an example of this is..., for example, for instance, such as, thus, as follows

Note: Avoid using *etc* in academic writing (too informal)

For restatement – *for rephrasing statements*

in other words, more simply, namely, simply put, to put it differently / another way, such as, that is

The cause of things – *to attribute the reasons for something occurring*

a / the consequence of, because, due to, for, the effect of ..., since, the result of ...

The effect of things – *to show the effect of something*

accordingly, as a result/consequence, consequently, for this reason, hence, so, therefore, thus

For concession / qualification – *conceding something*

admittedly, although, clearly though, even though, however, indeed, obviously

Generalisation – *making a general statement*

as a rule, for the most part, generally, in general, in most cases, normally, on the whole, usually

Time order – *to indicate a chronological sequence*

first, second, third (etc), next, before, earlier, finally, following, given the above, later, meanwhile, subsequently, then, to conclude, while

A note about punctuation & style

Check a **usage guide** for exact rules for punctuation. Many introductory phrases have a comma after them. For example, *'Therefore,...'* & *'In addition,...'* If in doubt, read the sentence aloud and add commas when you need to pause for breath. Also, several of the words listed above are too informal for use in an academic piece of writing – again, check a usage guide or good dictionary for details of appropriate use.

Connecting paragraphs

Apart from using the linking words / phrases above, showing the link between paragraphs could involve writing 'hand-holding' sentences. These are sentences that link back to the ideas of the previous paragraph. For instance, when outlining the positive and negative issues about a topic you could use the following:

Example (from beginning of previous paragraph):

One of the main advantages of X is . . .

One of the positive effects of X is . . .

When you are ready to move your discussion to the negative issues, you could write one of the following as a paragraph opener:

Example:

Having considered the positive effects of X, negative issues may now need to be taken into account . . .

Despite the positive effects outlined above, there are also negative issues to be considered . . .

It is always important to make paragraphs part of a coherent whole text; they must not be isolated units unrelated to the whole piece.

'Do not expect your reader to make the connection between your ideas, but make those connections explicit. This way, the reader will be lead in a logical order through your argument and will be reminded of your current theme or angle.'

(Gillett, Hammond, & Martala, 2009)

Checking for paragraph links in your own work

When you are editing your next written assignment, ask yourself the following questions as you read through your work:

- Does the start of my paragraph give my reader enough information about what the paragraph will be about?
- Does my paragraph add to or elaborate on a point made previously and, if so, have I made this explicit with an appropriate linking word / phrase?
- Does my paragraph introduce a completely new point or a different viewpoint to before and, if so, have I explicitly shown this with a suitable connective?
- Have I used similar connectives repeatedly? (If yes, may need to vary them using the above list.)

Adapted from: Gillett, Hammond & Martala (2009)

Works cited

Gillett, A. Hammond, A. & Martala, M. (2009). *Successful Academic Writing*. Harlow, UK.: Pearson Longman.

Further resources

Gillet, A. *Using English for Academic Purposes. Academic Writing*. Retrieved 2 Feb 2012 from <http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm>