Using ‘signpost’ words and phrases

This guide explains the use of words and phrases that connect your ideas into a logical argument and signal to the reader the structure of that argument. It outlines the kinds of connections you can make in your writing, and gives examples of words and phrases that achieve and signal these links.

Related guides: ‘Writing an Essay’.

What are ‘signpost’ words?

This is a name commonly given to words or phrases that express a connection between two ideas and make the transition from one point to the next in writing. They can link ideas within a sentence, link two sentences, two paragraphs, or even two parts of the essay together. They help to make writing flow smoothly, without any abrupt, disjointed breaks that leave the reader wondering what your points have to do with one another or what their relevance is.

Signpost words specify how the two ideas are related: for example, whether they are similar ideas, contrasting ideas, or whether one idea adds more detail or a further example to another. They can show that one idea is the result or conclusion of another, or to show the order of the ideas in a sequence. They are a key component in developing your argument showing the structure of your argument. They help your reader to follow where your essay is going; hence the term ‘signposts’.

To introduce a sequence of points in your argument

| Firstly, secondly etc | To begin with | Initially |
| Then               | Next          | Subsequently |
| Finally            | Lastly        |

- **To begin with**, this essay will identify the causes of this situation.
- **These factors will subsequently be analysed in detail.**
To cross-reference to other parts of the essay
As noted above / below  As stated previously
As is discussed below

• **As noted previously**, a number of scholars have offered a different explanation.
• **This development is composed of a number of stages, as discussed above.**

To add an idea, or more detail
In addition  Additionally  Furthermore
Moreover  Again  and
Also  Similarly  Besides
What is more  Equally  Indeed
Apart from this

• **The issue is, furthermore, complicated by external matters.**
• **Indeed, scholars reject this theory as unrealistic.**

To give an example
For example,  For instance  To demonstrate
As an illustration/example  To illustrate

• **Certain research methods, for instance, surveys and questionnaires, are particularly effective.**
• **As an example, the following quotation could be cited as representative of this viewpoint.**

To focus on specifics in more detail
In particular
Specifically

• **Such examples, and in particular those from the last five years, support the findings of recent research.**

To generalise
As a rule  For the most part  Generally
In general  On the whole  In most cases
Usually

• **In general, it is true to say that a good understanding of theory is essential.**
• **The conclusions are, for the most part, sound.**
**To introduce a comparison or further point to support your argument**

- Compared with the first example, the second seems unconvincing.
- This scholar’s argument is likewise flawed.

**To introduce a contrast or alternative point or section**

- Nevertheless, arguments in favour of the theory must also be considered.
- The case must not, however, be overstated.

**To introduce a fact or state the obvious**

- These claims must, of course, be closely examined.
- Clearly, popular opinion is against the changes.

**To rephrase or explain**

- There is only one negative example, namely, that of the government.
- The model is not universal. To be more precise, it is not applicable in seven per cent of the above cases.
To introduce a reason, result, proof or logical conclusion

Accordingly  As a consequence  As a result
Consequently  Hence  Therefore
Thus  For this reason  Because
Due to  Indeed  In fact
It could be concluded that

- The data are incomplete and, as a consequence, this interpretation is not convincing.
- Due to problems of access, research on this topic is scarce.

To conclude

In conclusion  To sum up  Finally
In short  To conclude
As this essay has demonstrated

- In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that the hypothesis is generally supported by the evidence.

Using Signpost words effectively

The signpost words and phrases can be used at the start of sentences or, in most cases, in the middle or at the end, as demonstrated above. They can be very effective in the first sentence of your paragraph to indicate what the function of that paragraph is in the context of your argument, or in the middle of a paragraph to develop your point.

They should be used with careful thought about their function. Good structure is more than a list of points, connected with signposts such as ‘also’, furthermore’, ‘in addition’, ‘the next point’. This may indicate that your argument is becoming descriptive rather than analytical. Be clear what the relationship between your points is. Variation in the kinds of signposts you use can indicate that you are critically analysing the issue and exploring the argument thoroughly, with contrasting views, more detailed development of points, and conclusions drawn.

It is important to use signpost words and phrases accurately, as they can change the meaning of what you write. These two sentences have opposite implications:

The government’s stance was resolute. However, the negotiations did not succeed.
The government’s stance was resolute. Therefore, the negotiations did not succeed.
Summary

These 'signpost' words and phrases make connections and transitions between the ideas in your writing. They help to make your argument clear to the reader by pointing out the relationship between your ideas, and where your line of thought is going. They can be used to signal the structure of your essay or the logical connections in your argument. Use them to link ideas within a sentence, or across sentences, paragraphs and sections of your essay.

Want to know more?

If you have any further questions about this topic you can make an appointment to see a Learning Enhancement Tutor in the Student Support Service, as well as speaking to your lecturer or adviser.

둥 Call: 01603 592761
둥 Ask: ask.let@uea.ac.uk
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