

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

By the same token	Compared with	In like manner
In comparison with	In the same way	Likewise
Similarly	Whereas	

- ***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

In contrast	However	Although
Nevertheless	Nonetheless	On the other hand
But	Yet	Alternatively
Conversely	By contrast,	On the contrary

- ***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 (be careful with these – is your point obvious, or an assumption that needs to be proved?)

After all	Clearly	Naturally
Evidently	Obviously	Of course
It is evident that		

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

To rephrase or explain

In other words	Or rather	That is to say
To put it more simply/in another way		Namely
To be more precise		

- *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.

Further guidance and information

If you have further questions about using 'signpost' words, or would like to discuss any other aspect of academic study, you can talk to your lecturer or Academic Adviser in your School, or make an appointment to see one of the [Learning Enhancement Tutors](#) in the **Dean of Students' Office**.

Telephone: 01603 592761
Email: dos.help@uea.ac.uk
Website: www.uea.ac.uk/dos/let

Further resources related to using 'signpost' words and phrases, and many other aspects of studying at university, are available from the Dean of Students' Office and on our [website](#).



This guidance leaflet is one of a series produced by the Dean of Students' Office at the University of East Anglia.

Scan the QR-code with a smartphone to access further resources on the Learning Enhancement Team's website.

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