

Connecting your ideas: Linking words

What are linking words and what are they for?

Cohesion and clarity are essential elements of academic writing. Making the connections between your ideas clear and visible can help achieve clear communication as it will be much easier for the person reading to follow what you are saying and understand your argument or premise. In order to make connections clear, you can use linking words between parts of a sentence, between sentences or between paragraphs. Looking for the right linking word prompts you to think about how you are trying to connect your ideas and whether the connections make sense.

Kinds of linking words

Let's explore linking words by looking at two short sentences that could be connected through appropriate linking words:

This theory could be applied to many contexts. The theory is most useful when analysing practical situations.

We can connect these sentences in a number of ways by using *linking* words to show specifically what kind of connection we are making. Here are some examples of how we can make them into one sentence in a variety of ways:

- This theory could be applied to many contexts, **however / although** it is most useful when analysing practical situations.
- This theory could be applied to many contexts **because** it is most useful when analysing practical situations.
- This theory could be applied to many contexts, **particularly** when analysing practical situations.

We can also link these ideas but keep them as two connected sentences by using appropriate linking language:

- This theory could be applied to many contexts. **However**, it is most useful when analysing practical situations **because**
- This theory could be applied to many contexts. **In particular**, it is most useful when analysing practical situations.
- This theory could be applied to many contexts. **Despite this**, it is most useful when analysing practical situations.

All of these examples have the same two ideas, but the links or connections between the ideas add subtle differences to the meaning in each case.

There are **four main categories** of connective devices used extensively in academic writing:

- **Adding information:** and, furthermore, in addition, also
- **Chronology:** previously, subsequently, firstly
- **Cause and effect:** if, therefore, thus, consequently
- **Compare and contrast:** similarly, in contrast, however

GENERAL NOTES – CONNECTIVES OR LINKING DEVICES:

- Avoid over-using linking words and phrases. It is not necessary to begin every sentence with a linking device. This can make your writing seem mechanical or formulaic.
- If you think you are over-using linking devices, take them out and read the sentence / paragraph / section without them. Do your ideas still hold together effectively? Is your message clear without overt connective devices?
- Avoid using the same linking word or phrase repeatedly throughout your writing. 'However' and 'furthermore' are commonly over-used linking words by many students. Try to use a variety of connective language in your academic writing.

Typical Linking Words

Type of link	Within a sentence	Between sentences or paragraphs	Hints, tips and examples
Adding similar information	and, also, another, too	In addition, moreover, furthermore, further, likewise, additionally, another, indeed, what is more	Never use 'and' at the start of a sentence.
Showing comparison and contrast	but, like, similarly, equally, whereas, however, although, though, while, compared with, is comparable to, unlike, yet, instead, still, notwithstanding, nonetheless, nevertheless, albeit	While, however, in contrast, by contrast, on the other hand, alternatively, compared with, correspondingly, similarly, unlike, nonetheless, nevertheless, on the contrary, conversely	Never use 'but' at the start of a sentence. When using a contrasting or comparing linking device to start a sentence, follow it with a comma (However, ... Similarly, ... On the other hand, ...).
Showing cause and effect/ consequence	so, because, if, thus, hence, therefore, consequently, may cause, can lead to, can result in, owing to, as a result of, as a consequence of, thereby, accordingly, otherwise, in that, in view of	Despite this, even so, as a result, for this reason, with this in mind, thus, therefore, accordingly, consequently, as a consequence, as a result, owing to, that being the case, in that case, in view of	Commas are generally used after these linking devices when they introduce a sentence (Therefore, ... Despite this, ...).
Showing condition	if, even then, even if, unless, after, once, until, whether, yet, provided, providing, since, when, on the condition that, whenever, wherever	As a result of, provided, providing, if, once, even then, even if, when, whenever, wherever	
Chronology	then, when, after, before, while, first, second, third, next, later, latter, former, finally	First, second, ... firstly, secondly, ... initially, to begin, at first, first of all, next, before, subsequently, previously, eventually, after, then, finally, to conclude, lastly, in summary, in short, to sum up, overall, in conclusion, in sum	Use ordinal sequencing devices sparingly in your writing. Find other ways to sequence ideas rather than repeatedly using 'firstly, ... secondly, ... thirdly, ...'.
Providing examples	such as, for instance, for example, including, evidenced by, exemplified by, illustrated by, demonstrated by, by way of example, notably	An example of this, for example, for instance, this is evidenced / demonstrated / illustrated by, a case in point, to illustrate, to demonstrate, notably	When introducing a long or complex list of examples, use a colon to introduce the list and semi-colons between the items in the list (... including: W; X; Y; and Z).
Referring to	regarding, considering, with regard to, with respect to, specifically, namely	Regarding, in terms of, in the case of, as regards, with regard to, with respect to, on the question of, on the subject of	

Cautious, tentative academic language	<p>may, might, could, likely, probably, probable, possibly, possible, suggest, appear to, almost certain, may be due to, could be attributed to, cannot be ruled out, often, generally, usually, frequently, most, almost all, the majority of, certain types of, tends to</p>	<p>It is thought that, it is believed, a widely held view is, it has been suggested, it may be, it is likely, it is probable, it is possible, there is some evidence to suggest, a likely / possible / probable explanation, in general, in general terms</p>	<p>It is important in academic writing to avoid expressing absolute certainty. 'Hedging devices' or modal expressions are used to reduce the strength of a statement or claim to allow for exceptions and to avoid over-generalising.</p>
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