



UNIVERSITY OF
PORTSMOUTH
ASK - ACADEMIC
SKILLS UNIT

Writing: Flow and Coherence

This handout provides information about writing coherently. It first provides general tips for using linking words and phrases (also called connectives or transition signals). Secondly, it briefly explains what connectives and transition signals are, and provides examples. Thirdly, it provides examples of words and phrases for: expressing certainty, being cautious, expressing doubt, using evidence, showing what comes first, showing what is most important, expressing sequence, and expressing finality or a conclusion.

Please note that the terms presented here are just a few examples to give you the idea. People often use them incorrectly or unnecessarily. This can cause confusion for the reader and also can cause you to become confused about what you are trying to say.

General Tips.

1. Learn your subject's technical and theoretical terms. Do not expect this to happen overnight. This learning will continue throughout your degree.
2. You should not try too hard to make your writing look more academic by using words and phrases purely to appear more academic. Ensure that you understand the subtlety regarding usage and meaning before you choose a term or phrase.
3. Avoid using a thesaurus for two very good reasons: first, there are very few exact synonyms in English. Secondly, some terms, especially technical and theoretical terms, have very specific meanings in some fields.

Connectives and Transition Signals.

Connectives link sentences, phrases and ideas, in order to take your reader through what you are saying. Transition terms are a type of connective, but they are used more specifically for indicating some kind of change or development.

They can be used to show the reader, for example:

- Your analysis and criticality.
- The flow of your work.
- The development of your material.
- A different angle on the same point.
- A complete change in direction.

Seven sets of examples:

1. The first claim, topic can be explained by.....
2. For example.
3. However; in contrast; on the other hand.
4. Nonetheless; despite this; although.
5. In addition; furthermore.
6. Therefore; consequently; as a result.

7. Similarly.

Appropriate Assertion.

Please note that it is usually best to avoid using terms such as obviously, undeniably, certainly and definitely, unless you are quoting someone else, because you cannot be 100% certain that you have explored **all** the possibilities. Therefore, you are advised to use **academic caution** when putting forward conclusions and citing authors(see below).

Here are six examples of what you could say:

1. This shows.
2. It is evident that.
3. It is therefore possible to conclude that.
4. The argument strongly suggests that.
5. This is supported by.
6. This demonstrates.

Instead of using everyday terms such as “surely” or “everybody knows”, it is best to say something like “It is common knowledge” or “generally accepted”.

Being cautious.

Academic caution is about not making absolute statements of fact. Please see the “Appropriate Assertion” section above.

Four sets of examples:

1. Seems to; tends to; looks like; appears to show; indicates; could be seen as.
2. Thinks; assumes; believes; suggests.
3. May; might; could; perhaps.
4. Probably; possibly; perhaps; conceivably.

Expressing doubt.

Doubt can be expressed on, for example, the evidence, an argument, or a claim in the literature. It can also be about what you yourself are saying.

Five examples of phrases:

1. It is possible that this means.
2. This could indicate that.
3. The argument is plausible because.
4. This claim is debatable because.
5. Therefore, it is an implausible argument.

Using Evidence.

Evidence can come from a range of sources as appropriate for your field. It could come, for example, from data, results, findings, newspapers, databases, documentaries, or sound logical thinking and argument.

Six examples of phrases:

1. The evidence shows.

2. Table 1 demonstrates.
3. Figure 2 indicates.
4. According to the results.
5. The argument suggests.
6. The author implies that.

Please note that **the writer implies** something, whereas **the reader infers** something.

Expressing what comes first or is most important.

Ensure that you really are talking about the most important thing or element of a thing.

Five examples of phrases:

1. The primary issue.
2. The key point.
3. The principal argument.
4. The main point.
5. First, this essay will.

Expressing sequence:

It is important that the reader should be kept in touch with where they are in your written work. It can be easy to lose track when reading your extended writing.

Importantly, expressing sequence also demonstrates that you are thinking logically and systematically, to present your points or argument soundly, through keeping in touch with how elements relate to each other.

Seven examples:

- Previously.
- Next.
- Secondly.
- Furthermore.
- Subsequently.
- In addition.
- Moreover.

Expressing finality.

Five examples:

- Lastly.
- Finally.
- Overall.
- Ultimately.
- In conclusion.

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