



# Signposting.

An essay can be thought of as a journey from the introduction to the conclusion. In this analogy you are the driver, and your readers are your passengers. Signposts are the roads on the map which you choose to take.

Please note that, although this information sheet focuses on essays, the basic principles apply to most types of assignment.

If you do not signpost, it is a bit like sleeping on a journey and only waking up occasionally. It can be disorientating. You tend to wonder where you are and how you got there. This is exactly the feeling that tutors have if your content is not clearly signposted.

The examples provided below are only intended for guidance. Each word and phrase has its own precise meaning. Therefore, you must use the correct term. The examples are not instructions. They are suggestions. You do not have to reproduce them exactly. Also, many of the terms can be used in any section of an essay, but choose carefully. You should try to ensure that the phrase and verb you choose are right for your field and for what you want to say.

## What signposting means.

Signposting means using words to tell your reader about the content of your essay. This is done to help the reader understand as clearly as possible. Below are three examples of signposts and what they mean.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Signpost.</b> In order to explain and understand the causes of this offence, it would be useful to apply criminological theory. | <b>Meaning.</b> The reader knows that the writer will use theory to explore and explain a criminal offence.                     |
| <b>Signpost.</b> There are several ways in which the new style shopping centres may be seen as attractive.                         | <b>Meaning.</b> The reader knows that the writer will include at least two aspects of attractiveness.                           |
| <b>Signpost.</b> Another issue which often concerns feminists is the pay gap.  | <b>Meaning.</b> The reader is reminded that at least one issue has been written about, and that another is about to be covered. |

## Types of Signposting.

Signposting can come in the form of single words, short phrases, long phrases, or whole sentences. Examples of each are provided below.

## Single Words.

However; furthermore; initially.

## Short Phrases.

In contrast; in conclusion; an additional point.

## Sentence.

Having discussed the reliability of the research, this report will next address its validity.

## Signposting in the Introduction, the Main Body and the Conclusion.

The table below contains some terms which you may use for signposting, in the introduction, main body and conclusion.

### Signposting in the Introduction.

The following table provides the opening statement “This essay will”, then a verb which could follow it, then the start of the next sentence and a verb which could follow it.

| Initial phrase  | Verb   | Next sentence | Verb       |
|-----------------|--|---------------|------------|
| This essay will | focus on (for example, the point, data, idea, issue, et cetera). | It will then  | Ascertain. |
| This essay will | examine (for example, the point, data, idea, et cetera).         | It will then  | Establish. |
| This essay will | Address (for example, the point, data, issue, et cetera).        | It will then  | Clarify.   |
| This essay will | Analyse (for example, the point, data, issue, et cetera).        | It will then  | Show.      |

You might wish to quantify what the essay will do. For example, you could say, “This essay will address three aspects”. You could also signpost how this will be done. For example, you could say, “This essay will attempt to determine whether cats are better pets than dogs by analysing studies of their behaviour.” Other examples of terms you could use are describe, review, evaluate and explore. There are many others.

### Signposting in the Main Body.

The following table provides a word or phrase, then what it tells the reader.

| Word or phrase.      | What it tells the reader.        |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| This essay will now. | This introduces what comes next. |

| <b>Word or phrase.</b> | <b>What it tells the reader.</b>  |
|------------------------|---|
| In addition.           | This adds to the point, issue or data.  |
| Furthermore.           | This takes the point, issue or data further.  |
| In contrast.           | This introduces a strong alternative or challenge.                                      |
| However.               | This adds an alternative or challenge, but less strongly than the phrase “in contrast”. |

Signposting does not always mean having a statement of intent, such as “It will then”, or “In addition”. You may simply state the point. For example, to signpost a point or paragraph, you could say “Cats are often seen as less affectionate than dogs”.

## Signposting in conclusions.

In conclusions, you can use many terms and phrases as you have in the introduction and main body. Again, however, be cautious as they are not all appropriate for a conclusion. You never introduce new material in a conclusion. You can use the past perfect tense, such as “This essay has focussed on”. However, you can also use the present tense, such as “This essay shows that”, or “demonstrates”.

Additional resources which could help you with signposting and the range of terms you can use are: “[Paragraphs: Main Body of an Assignment](#)”, and “[Writing about others’ work: verbs for citations](#)”. Many of the verbs are also suitable for signposts.

**If you would like an ASK tutorial, please contact us.**

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