

GRAMMAR

Discourse markers for advanced English

LEVEL

Upper-Intermediate
(B2)

NUMBER

EN_B2_3052G

LANGUAGE

English

A photograph of a man and a woman in a professional setting. The man, on the left, has a beard and glasses, wearing a dark suit and tie. The woman, on the right, has grey hair and glasses, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. They are both smiling and looking at each other, with the man's hands gesturing as if in conversation. The background is a blurred office window.

Learning outcomes

- I can identify and explain the usage of some more advanced discourse markers.
- I can use discourse markers to organise my speech and writing appropriately.



Warm-up

Here are some **informal discourse markers**.

1

***As I was saying**, they're a good band but I don't really like their new stuff.*

2

***Absolutely!** I've wanted to go there for ages. Let's check it out together.*

3

*Yes, **exactly**. I'm glad we're on the same page.*

4

*I want to see as much as I can while I'm there. **Mind you**, it's an expensive place so I'll need to save up first.*

5

***To tell you the truth**, I didn't enjoy it as much as I thought. Maybe my expectations were too high.*



What do you think is the **function** of each one in the sentences?

Why use discourse markers?

Read the texts. **Answer** the questions.

Discourse markers are words and phrases which are used to connect and organise ideas. They are signposts that help to structure what you say and guide the listener and reader through the content. Discourse markers can help us with comparing, contrasting and opposing and adding information.

To begin with, it's great to see you in class today. What are some of our goals when mastering a language?

Well, above all, we want to express ourselves clearly and link our ideas together in a sophisticated manner. Anyway, let's get started and learn how we can more easily manage a conversation with discourse markers.

What are discourse markers, according to text 1?

What three functions of discourse markers are mentioned in text 1?

Identify four discourse markers used in text 2.

Choose one of the discourse markers you identified. What is its function in the text?

Comparing

We can use discourse markers to **highlight the similarities** between two things.

We call this showing **comparison**.



Sales in France have soared over the past few months.
Correspondingly, sales in Germany are increasing at a very high rate.

Discourse markers for comparing

similarly



The marketing team has had a successful month. **Similarly**, the product team have made a lot of progress.

likewise



Profits have risen steadily this year. **Likewise**, market share has improved considerably.

in the same way



To run a business you need to be organised. **In the same way**, you should always keep detailed financial records.

Contrasting or opposing

We can also use discourse markers to link an idea with another which is unexpected, or show the differences between two things. This shows a **contrast**. They can also be used to **oppose** a previous statement and make a **counter argument**.

Discourse markers of this sort are generally placed at the **beginning** of the sentence. These discourse markers are effective to use in debates or speeches when giving an opinion or making a point.



Despite all our market research, sales have been falling.
Although it's very hard work, I love my job.



Discourse markers for contrasting and opposing

Read the examples below.

1 **however**

2 **conversely**

3 **in contrast**

4 **on the contrary**

5 **although**

6 **despite**

a We took a risk. **However**, this backfired and sales are suffering as a result.

b This could mean that they hated the proposal, or, **conversely**, that they loved it. Let's wait and see.

c Sales have been steadily rising this month, **in contrast** to last month when they were plummeting.

d We were told that sales had increased significantly in Germany. **On the contrary**, they fell slightly.

e **Although** this is a serious problem for our company, our competitors will likely be facing the same problem.

f I like my job **despite** the long working hours.



Categorise

Categorise the discourse markers.



1

similarly

2

in contrast

3

on the contrary

4

likewise

5

although

6

conversely

7

in the same way

8

despite

9

however

Comparing

Contrasting/opposing



Comparison and contrast

Rewrite the sentences below, showing **comparison or contrast**. You can complete this activity in pairs in breakout rooms. Correct answers together as a class.

1 The old school didn't have great facilities. The new school is state-of-the-art.



The old school didn't have great facilities.
However, the new school is state-of-the-art.

2 Janie can sing beautifully. Joshua can play the piano well.



3 The weather is great today. Tomorrow will be rainy.



4 I love maths. I don't like writing.



5 Online sales have boomed. Retail sales have decreased.



6 Apples are healthy. Oranges have health benefits too.



*similarly - likewise
in the same way - however
conversely - in contrast
although - despite*



Oppose these statements

Use discourse markers to oppose the statements below.

Dating within a company shouldn't be allowed.

We need minimum wage.

Micromanagement will improve employee performance.

You should always include a photo on your CV.

Global warming is a myth.

Technology is dehumanising us.

similarly – likewise – in the same way

however – conversely – in contrast

on the contrary – although – despite

Organising a speech or a presentation

- **Discourse markers** are also very useful when **writing** a text or **organising a speech** or **presentation**. They can help us to **order ideas** and **sequence arguments**. They give a sense of **formality**.

The next few slides show how discourse markers can be used **to introduce specific sections**, to facilitate structuring your writing or speech.



Firstly, I'd like to welcome the keynote speaker to the room...

Finally, let's have a round of applause for everyone behind the scenes who made this event possible...



Categorise

Categorise the discourse markers. You are probably familiar with most of these.

1

First and foremost

2

To conclude/in conclusion

3

To begin with

4

To sum up

5

On top of that

6

What's more

7

Secondly/Thirdly

8

Finally

9

In summary

10

For a start

Introduction

Introduce an idea, paragraph or section

Body

Signal additional ideas within a paragraph or section

Conclusion

Signal the conclusion or summary of an idea or section



Thus and hence

Read the example sentences and explanations below.

He is happy with the project. **Thus**, we can expect further work from this client.

There are train strikes; **hence** the increase in staff absences.

- **Discourse markers** can also be used to signal **additional information** in a more **formal way**. The following examples can **add information** in a way that shows the second statement follows logically from the first.

Prepare a speech

1. Choose one of the topics below (or come up with your own topic).
2. Prepare a short speech on your chosen topic using as many of the discourse markers as you can.

- The importance of funding space travel and research
- The possibilities of solar energy
- Future advances in medicine.

Introduction

Firstly...To begin with...

For a start...

Body

Secondly.../Thirdly.../on top of that...

Conclusion

In conclusion...

In summary...To sum up...

Additional information

Thus... Hence...

Comparing

Similarly...Likewise...

In the same way...

Contrasting/Opposing

Although...

In contrast...Conversely...





Give your speech!

Present your speech to the class.

Your classmates will listen and prepare some **questions** to ask you afterwards.





End of the lesson

Idiom

Be that as it may...

Meaning: despite (that); despite (what you say); nevertheless

Example: I know that the deadline is tomorrow and everyone is tired; be that as it may, we can't compromise on quality now!



Additional practice



Discuss the sentences

Identify the discourse markers in the following sentences. What is their function? Some of them have not been covered in the lesson, but try to make an educated guess!

- 1 To tell you the truth, I felt the same way as Dave in the meeting.
- 2 Although the evidence is concerning, there is not enough data to make a concrete opinion.
- 3 So, I think we need to discuss our new marketing strategy.
- 4 Changes will need to occur for this to become more democratic. For a start, we must all contribute to the creative direction of the group.
- 5 Our competitors are moving to flood the industry with a cheaper product. Likewise, we must do the same.



Notes on usage

Read the advice below. **Answer** the questions.

Be aware that using too many discourse markers can result in writing which sounds clunky and artificial. Try to only use them when necessary. Beyond the uses studied in this lesson, discourse markers can also be used in the following ways:

- to begin a conversation or initiate communication
- to mark a change or shift in topic
- to begin a response or reply
- to serve as filler
- as a way of delaying

What is the danger of using too many discourse markers?

Can you think of any discourse markers that can be used for the purposes listed above?

What discourse markers do you think you'll be likely to use on a regular basis?



Talk about your day

Tell the class about your day. Try to **use** the following discourse markers in your response.

Eg: *Well, I woke up early and then went for a run. Mind you, I was so tired, I didn't really want to go. On top of that, I didn't sleep well...*

Well...

Mind you...

On top of
that...

To sum up...





Answer key

P.3: Suggested answers 1. referring to a previous statement 2. Showing enthusiasm and/or agreement 3. Confirming that what the other person said is correct 4. Similar meaning to "but" (contrasting or modifying what has been said) 5. Emphasis (often prefacing a negative feeling)

P.4: 3. To begin with; Well; Above all; Anyway

P.11: Comparing: 1, 4, 7 Contrasting/opposing: 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9

P.13: Introduction: 1, 3, 10 Body: 5, 6, 7 Conclusion: 2, 4, 8, 9



Summary

Informal discourse markers:

- *As I was saying...; Absolutely!; exactly; Mind you...; To tell the truth...;*
- **As I was saying**, they're a good band but I don't really like their new stuff.
- **To tell the truth**, I don't really like crowded places.

Comparison discourse markers:

- We can use discourse markers to **highlight the similarities** between two things. We call this showing **comparison**.
- *similarly; likewise; in the same way*
- *Sales have fallen in France. **Similarly**, they've taken a hit in Germany.*

Contrast discourse markers:

- Link an idea with another which is unexpected and show the differences between two things. Can also be used to **oppose** a previous statement and make a **counter argument**.
- Generally placed at the **beginning** of the sentence.
- *despite; although; however; conversely; in contrast; on the contrary*

Discourse markers for organising a speech:

- Can help us to **order ideas** and **sequence arguments**. They give a sense of **formality**.
- *First and foremost; Firstly; To begin with; For a start*
- *On top of that; What's more; Secondly/Thirdly*
- *To conclude/In conclusion; Finally; To sum up; In summary*



Summary

Thus and hence:

- Used to signal **additional information** in a more **formal way**. The following examples can **add information** in a way that shows the second statement follows logically from the first.
- *He is happy with the project. **Thus**, we can expect further work from this client.*
- *There are train strikes; **hence** the increase in staff absences.*



Vocabulary

As I was saying...

Absolutely!

exactly

Mind you...

To tell you the truth...

similarly

likewise

In the same way

despite

although

however

conversely

in contrast

on the contrary

thus

hence

