

Guidelines for the discourse connectives task

Prolific study



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Task background

- ▶ An important aspect of understanding a text is identifying the relations between clauses and sentences.
- ▶ These relations are called **discourse relations**.
- ▶ Discourse relations hold between two text spans → referred to as **segments**.
- ▶ In the task that you will perform, segments are often sentences, but they can be smaller (clauses) or larger (paragraphs) as well.

Example of a discourse relation:

Segment 1: F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in gin-fuelled bursts.

Segment 2: He believed alcohol was essential to his creative process.

→ Segment 2 presents the **reason** for Segment 1.

Task background

- ▶ Discourse relations can be expressed through **discourse connectives**; they signal what type of discourse relation holds.
- ▶ Examples of discourse connectives are *because*, *as a result*, *specifically*, *for example*, *but*, etc.

Example of a discourse relation:

Segment 1: F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in gin-fuelled bursts.

Segment 2: He believed alcohol was essential to his creative process.

→ because could express the reason relation between these sentences:

*Scott Fitzgerald wrote in gin-fuelled bursts **because** he believed alcohol was essential to his creative process.*

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What is a discourse connective?

- ▶ Discourse connectives are words that connect clauses or sentences.
- ▶ They express a logical relation between the two parts of the text.
- ▶ Connectives can be conjunctions (e.g. but), adverbs (e.g., however), prepositions (e.g., after) or prepositional phrases (e.g. for example).

→ For our task, you do not need to know exactly what type of word each connective is. Just understand that connectives are more than just conjunctions.

This training will give you plenty of examples of discourse connectives. Study them so that you can use them appropriately in the task. You are allowed to take notes and use them during the task.

What is not a discourse connective

- ▶ Words such as which or that are not discourse connectives, because they do not tell us what type of relationship holds between the two parts of text. → Connectives need to express a logical relation between two parts of text.
- ▶ Words that you use to make the second sentence more grammatical are not discourse connectives. For example, function words such as the or a do not tell us the relation between the two parts of text.
- ▶ Words that express sentiment, such as luckily and unfortunately, are not discourse connectives. They only express feeling about one part of the relation and do not express a relationship between the two parts of a text.

Discourse connective examples, part 1

Example:

The judge announced his verdict. The criminal was sentenced to prison.

- ▶ You can use the discourse connective specifically to express that the second sentence specifies (gives more detail) what is mentioned in the first sentence.
- ▶ Using which was or that to connect these sentences is incorrect; these are not discourse connectives!

Example:

Josh hasn't gone swimming in a week. He usually goes swimming every day.

- ▶ Even though can be used to express that it is unexpected that Josh hasn't gone swimming in a week, given the information in the second sentence.
- ▶ Generally or typically cannot be used to connect these two sentences! They say something about the second sentence, but not about the relation between the first and second sentence.

Discourse connective examples, part 2

Example:

Grapsus grapsus is a species of crab. Known as the red rock crab, they are considered to be beautiful.

- ▶ You can use and to express that both sentences convey information about the same topic, or in more detail to express that the second sentence provides more detailed information about the topic in the first sentence.
- ▶ Using they are or also to connect these sentences is incorrect; they only make the second sentence sound more grammatical. (Note: “also” can be a connective, but not when it is used in “also known as”.)

Example:

Seagulls like to eat *Grapsus grapsus*. They are now becoming extinct.

- ▶ You can use as a result or so to express that the first sentence presents the reason for the second sentence.
- ▶ You should not use sadly to connect these sentences since that expresses sentiment and not a relation.

Discourse connective exercise

Try to identify all connectives in the text. Tip: many occur between clauses in this text, so don't only look between sentences. And don't peek at the answers!

First off, my dog recovered from her allergic reaction and I have recovered from accidentally eating one of her dog pills because I couldn't split it in half so I used my teeth. I figured I would either get really healthy or die but neither happened so it was basically a very anticlimactic superhero origin story.

Secondly, my parents came over and I felt bad that the house is a mess but they're very nonjudgemental. I considered cleaning up because probably your parents worry about you if you have a toilet seat on the kitchen counter. But it was a brand new toilet seat still in the package so technically it was more like I was bragging about my new purchase and that seemed like a good way to reassure my parents that they didn't need to worry about me because I was obviously doing pretty damn good if I had unused toilet seats to spare. Victor didn't see it the same way but Victor's family are a bunch of Rockefellers who I guess go through new toilet seats every week like they're disposable.

Source: adapted from thebloggess.com

Discourse connective exercise – answers

We have underlined all discourse connectives in the text. Did you get them all?

First off, my dog recovered from her allergic reaction and I have recovered from accidentally eating one of her dog pills because I couldn't split it in half so I used my teeth. I figured I would either get really healthy or die but neither happened so it was basically a very anticlimactic superhero origin story.

Secondly, my mom and dad came over and I felt bad that the house is a mess but they're very nonjudgemental. I considered cleaning up because probably your parents worry about you if you have a toilet seat on the kitchen counter. But it was a brand new toilet seat still in the package so technically it was more like I was bragging about my new purchase and that seemed like a good way to reassure my parents that they didn't need to worry about me because I was obviously doing pretty damn good if I had unused toilet seats to spare. Victor didn't see it the same way but Victor's family are a bunch of Rockefellers who I guess go through new toilet seats every week like they're disposable.

Did you select any that were not connectives? For example, in “*my mom and dad*”, “and” is not a connective because it only connects two nouns.

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The task

- ▶ In the tasks that we will invite you for, you will be presented with a set of paragraphs, which will be presented one paragraph at a time.
- ▶ There is no connective in the text to mark the relation between the two parts.
- ▶ This is why we need you to tell us which connective fits. Based on your provided connective, we will know which relation holds between the two segments.

The instructions for our tasks are as follows:

- ▶ First, carefully read the presented text.
- ▶ Then, for every paragraph, you will complete two steps.
 - ▶ In the first step, fill in a connective that can express the relation that you think holds between the two segments of the paragraph.
 - ▶ In the second step, choose from a list which connective best expresses the relation.

Step 1

- ▶ Freely write the connective that you think fits between the two segments.
- ▶ What you write in Step 1 will be used to determine which connectives you are presented with in Step 2.
- ▶ Write only connectives, not grammatical words like “the”, “which”, etc.
- ▶ Be careful not to make any typos! This will affect the list you see in Step 2.
- ▶ In this example, you could write because:

Michelle will really like the concert // she loves the cello.

next step

Step 2

- ▶ Go through the connectives in the box and choose the best-fitting one.
- ▶ It is possible that multiple connectives sound appropriate. In such cases, go with your instincts to choose the one that best expresses the meaning of the relation.

Please drag the best-suited connective into the green target box below.

Candidate connectives

nevertheless,

also,

specifically,

because

before

so

Michelle will really like the concert // she loves the cello.

Submit

Step 2 – Additional information

- ▶ Sometimes the connective that best expresses the relation may not fit the item well because it sounds awkward grammatically.
- ▶ This is why you have to make sure to focus on the meaning of the connective (and not how it sounds).

Example

[Sam brushed his teeth.] [He put toothpaste on his brush.]

- ▶ You tend to brush you teeth *after* you have applied toothpaste.
- ▶ You fill in “after” in Step 1, and you are provided with this list in Step 2:
at the same time, since, additionally, previously
- ▶ You might think that “previously” sounds awkward in this example; it is very formal and an uncommon connective.
- ▶ However, it does provide the intended relation sense, and so it is the best choice here.

Ready, set, go!

You can now go to the next part of the training, where you will learn about different types of relations. Please return to the experiment and click “Next”.

If you have any questions, please send us a message via Prolific.

Good luck with the task and thank you for participating!