

Use of Conjunctions

Two common errors in using conjunctions are (1) **overuse**, and (2) **inappropriate use**.

In the first case, a student will feel it is necessary to use a conjunctive adverb at the beginning of every sentence. This should not be done. *The conjunction should only be used if the connection between the two sentences would somehow be unclear or less smooth without the conjunction.* You can test this by removing the conjunction; if the two sentences still flow smoothly in sound and meaning—if the relationship between them is still clear—then the conjunction is not required.

In the second case, conjunctions are (a) used because they belong in a general category, and not because they truly fit the text, or (b) used too simply.

There is a difference in the usage of various conjunctions. In the case of addition conjunctions, some can be used with simple addition, whereas some only sound good when they are used with a transition between two larger or more complex ideas which are similar to but not the same as each other. In short, you can use the more complex transitions if the sentences are more different specifically while remaining similar in general.

For example:

He bought toys for all seven of his grandchildren, **and** wine for his son-in-laws.

He bought toys for all seven of his grandchildren. **In addition**, he researched his son-in-laws' preferences and found exactly the right type of wine for a gift.

He bought toys for all seven of his grandchildren. He **also** researched his son-in-laws' preferences and found exactly the right type of wine for a gift. **Moreover**, he spent four hours cleaning the house in preparation for their visit.

Note how the first example has the same subject & predicate exactly.

In the second example, the subject and predicate are different, though the general concept is still about buying gifts.

In the third example, the action is very different (cleaning instead of buying), and the last sentence is more separate; it is similar only in the general sense of preparing for a visit.

Moreover can be used when listing an additional point which is similar to what came before.

Furthermore is used when expressing something that goes *beyond* what came before, some new aspect or point that was not previously mentioned.

He was working all day long to prepare for the guests. He picked up things and set them straight, vacuumed all the rooms, washed all the dishes, and even dusted the surfaces. **Furthermore**, he spent an hours carefully cleaning the plates, glasses, and silverware so there would be no water spots or specks of dirt on any of them.

This can work even when the continued action is not essential to the main goal of the actor, as long as it is a more extreme continuation of the previous activities:

He was working all day long to prepare for the guests. He picked up things and set them straight, vacuumed all the rooms, washed all the dishes, and even dusted the surfaces. **Furthermore**, he spent two hours on the roof, clearing off old leaves and branches, even though most of his guests would never notice it.

Another example of inappropriate use is the use of conjunctions in too simple a way:

First body paragraph:

First, John works hard for very long hours at his job.

Second body paragraph:

Second, John spends many hours at home finishing his day's work and preparing for the next day.

Third body paragraph:

Third, John uses his free time on the weekends to do a multitude of chores around his hours.

Use of simply **First**, **Second**, and **Third**, or perhaps **First**, **Next**, and **Last** are too common and too simple. It is similar to the exchange, "*Hello, how are you?*" and "*Fine, thank you, and you?*" It is okay once, but if repeated every time, it sounds dry and mechanical.

Using a greater variety of expressions, including sometimes **similarity** conjunctions instead of just **addition** conjunctions, will help your writing sound better.

Additionally, there is often nothing at the end of the previous paragraph which helps the transition to the following paragraph. A paragraph must end just the way an essay must end: not suddenly, but with consideration of what comes next.

Here is the end of one paragraph and the beginning of another paragraph adapted from a student's essay. In this case, the subject of the essay is someone who does not or cannot think for herself, and feels she must do whatever other people want:

... She didn't say anything and followed our suggestion after all. During the trip, she told me that to be honest, she wanted to go to Hakone.

My friend can't stop asking for help even if it's a little problem. She needed my help when she got stuck in her homework when she was a high school student. ...

In the above case, the new paragraph begins without any transition from the previous paragraph. Here is another version, using a transition which expresses that a new and more interesting or important example follows:

... She didn't say anything and followed our suggestion after all. During the trip, she told me that to be honest, she wanted to go to Hakone.

In fact, my friend can't stop asking for help even if it's a little problem. She needed my help when she got stuck in her homework when she was a high school student. ...

However, the previous paragraph also does not transition. It would be better to end the paragraph with something that bridges the gap. Ideally, it is a statement that is true for both linked paragraphs. It should not be *so general* that it simply repeats the thesis statement. Look at the two blocks of text that you are connecting (two examples or paragraphs), and try to find a sentence which is more general than either specific example, but is specifically similar between the two of them:

... She didn't say anything and followed our suggestion after all. During the trip, she told me that to be honest, she wanted to go to Hakone. **However, she could not speak up and assert herself.**

In fact, my friend can't stop asking for help even if it's a little problem. She needed my help when she got stuck in her homework when she was a high school student. ...

You could also create a longer initial phrase or clause that makes the transition smoother:

... She didn't say anything and followed our suggestion after all. During the trip, she told me that to be honest, she wanted to go to Hakone. **However, she could not speak up and assert herself.**

Nor could she be independent in other ways; for example, she can't stop asking for help even if it's a little problem. She needed my help when she got stuck in her homework when she was a high school student. ...

Conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs are a simple way to join sentences, ideas, examples, and paragraphs—but very often it is better to use phrases, clauses, and even sentences to do the job more smoothly.