



# The art of linking text

Understanding the power of sentence signposts to link paragraphs, sentences, and information within sentences is key to achieving cohesive text that flows logically. They take the reader by the hand and guide them through the text somewhat like a sat nav guides a driver.

The term sentence signpost is a non-grammatical umbrella term to cover all the different structures used to guide a reader through a text. It includes the following grammatical structures:

1. **Co-ordinating conjunctions** (e.g. *and, but, or*). These are used to link the parts of sentences together, as in the following three-clause compound sentence: *The Dalek stared at the man **and** threatened to exterminate him **but** the man did not believe it.* Each clause is equally important.
2. **Subordinating conjunctions** (e.g. *because, if, since, although*). These are used to link two or more clauses within a sentence together, creating a main clause and one (or more) subordinate clauses, as in the following complex two-clause sentence: ***Although** the Dalek threatened to exterminate him, the man did not believe it.*
3. **Adverbials** – often at the front of sentences, hence the strange technical name ‘fronted adverbial’ (e.g. *However, Later that day, In addition*). These can be used to introduce a new paragraph or to link the sense of two separate sentences as in these examples:
  - a) *The Dalek threatened to exterminate the man. **However**, the man did not believe it.*
  - b) *The Dalek stared at the man and threatened to exterminate him. **Unfortunately**, the man did not believe it.*

*As with all adverbials, they don’t have to stay at the front of the sentence but can move around within it but then, of course, they become just adverbials! They are, normally, marked off by commas:*
  - c) *The Dalek threatened to exterminate the man. The man, **however**, did not believe it.*
  - d) *The Dalek stared at the man and threatened to exterminate him. The man did not, **unfortunately**, believe him.*

A writer who wants to use them to guide the reader, usually puts them at the front of a sentence. If you throw them into the body of the sentence, they have more of an extra information role.
4. **Standard sentence structure beginning with a pronoun that refers back to whatever is being talked about to help the reader/listener follow the link succinctly.** E.g. *This led to ...; It resulted in ...*, as in the following simple sentence: ***This causes** the water to boil.*

Conjunctions (of the co-ordinating and subordinating variety) and fronted adverbials were covered by the umbrella-term *connective* in the National Strategy but the term *connective* is not mentioned in the New Curriculum because of the emphasis on using grammatical terminology. We use the term *sentence signpost* for any words and phrases that link text because it is useful for children to

recognise the importance of using phrases that guide the reader or listener. As stated above, it is an umbrella term covering all the grammatical ways of linking text which are further illustrated below:

- **Co-ordinating conjunctions:** (e.g. *and, but, or*)  
*I like tea **and** chocolate **but** I don't like coffee.*
- **Subordinating conjunctions:** (e.g. *because, if, since*)  
*He felt nervous **because** an inspector had entered the room.*
- **Some fronted adverbials:** (e.g. *However, ... Unfortunately, ... The following day*)  
*The children cheered. **However**, one child felt very sad.*
- **Pronouns at the start of a sentence** referring back to earlier information: e.g.  
*The children cheered. **This** made one child feel very sad.*
- **Relative pronouns** (e.g. *who, that*) *Once, there was a boy called Charlie **who** lived in a big city.*

To write effectively, children need to know the difference between simple sentences (only one clause), compound sentences (more than one clause linked by co-ordinating conjunctions giving the clauses equal weight) and complex sentences (at least two clauses often linked by a subordinating conjunction, and always having a main clause and at least one subordinate clause). Children, therefore, need to understand the difference between the role of co-ordinating conjunctions and subordinating ones. When initially teaching co-ordinating conjunctions, it's best to focus on *and, but & or* as these are the ones that can only function as conjunctions.

It is worth pointing out that you can't really explain anything **without** using subordinating conjunctions **because** they show how one thing leads to another, **as** illustrated by the highlighted words in this sentence and its many clauses!

This is an important area and one in which understanding the grammar really makes a big difference. It is an area that often features on wall displays so it's important to get it right; otherwise greater confusion will ensue on all sides. We all need help with grammar; it is a tricky thing because context can change the function of words. It's worth having a grammar support group and helping each other teach grammar engagingly and accurately, supported by effective accurate grammar posters.

For a wide range of ideas on how to develop linking skills, see *Jumpstart! Grammar* – they hold the key to cohesive writing.

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