



# **Discourse Markers and Coherence in Text and Conversation**

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the complex relationship between discourse markers and coherence in both written text and conversation. Discourse markers are also known as transitional phrases or linking words and play an important role in organizing and connecting ideas within spoken or written communication like conversations, speeches, essays, or articles. Through a comprehensive analysis, this study explores how discourse markers contribute to coherence by facilitating smooth transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and conversational turns. Additionally, it examines the differences in the types and functions of discourse markers in written text versus conversation. By investigating this relationship, the research offers valuable and new understandings or perspectives which provide deeper knowledge and comprehension of the relationship between language structures, discourse markers, and coherent communication.

## 1.Introduction

This section attempts to explain the following topics: definition and types of discourse markers, coherence (in written text and conversation), and importance of coherence in written text and conversation.

### 1.1 Definition of discourse markers

According to Amanda (2022), discourse markers are words and phrases which we use in written and spoken English to organize and link what we are saying. You may also hear them called ‘transition words’, ‘signal words’, ‘linking words’, or even ‘fillers’.

Chuang (2020) defines discourse markers as being more commonly 'linking words' and 'linking phrases', or 'sentence connectors'. He also describes them as “the 'glue' that binds together a piece of writing, making the different parts of the text 'stick together’”. Chuang (2020) also states that they are used less frequently in speech, unless the speech is very formal.

Markham (2019) refers to discourse markers as also expressions. He explains that in addition to linking sentences, discourse markers also manage and help to organize them; “they connect what is written or said with something else”. However, they make no change to the meaning.

Markham (2019) further states that discourse markers are sometimes called fillers and that they are important to make your speech or text flow and to avoid a series of short unconnected statements.

Thus, discourse markers can be words, phrases, and expressions used in written and spoken English. They are referred to in different ways. They may be called ‘transition words’, ‘signal words’, ‘linking words’, ‘fillers’, or even 'sentence connectors'. Discourse markers are used to link, manage, and help to organize sentences.

## 1.2 Types of discourse markers

The types of discourse marker used in speaking are often quite different to those used in writing.

Spoken discourse markers tend to be less formal and can include the following (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 73):

- Interjections: Oh! Wow! Ah; Ouch!
- Hesitators: Ummm; Erm; Er; Hmmm; Well
- Expletives: Damn! My God! Goodness me! Oh no! [and insert your own expletives here]
- Vocatives: Hey! Wait! Dude; Mate; Oi!

Discourse markers that are used in writing can be categorized according to the purpose they perform into the following categories (Bailey, 2018, p. 202):

### 1. Comparing and contrasting

When you want to talk about how two things are different, or look at alternatives, you might use these words and phrases:

- Whereas
- On the contrary
- Nevertheless
- Even though
- Instead of

### 2. Similarities

To talk about two things that are almost the same, and highlight similarities, transition words such as these will help:

- Similarly
- Likewise
- Analogous to
- In a similar fashion
- Just as
- Equally
- In the same way

### 3. Addition

These expressions are used when you need to add to what you have already said:

- As well (as)
- Additionally
- Furthermore
- What's more
- On top of this
- Besides

### 4. Giving examples

If you need to illustrate a point or give an example of what you mean, these phrases can help:

- For example
- For instance
- Such as
- As we can see from
- As shown by
- In particular
- Especially

### 5. Cause and effect/ reason

When talking about one thing that caused or impacted another thing, you'll need some of these:

- Because
- As a result of
- Thanks to
- This has the effect of
- Consequently
- Since
- In that case
- Otherwise

### 6. Indicating time order

These words and phrases are helpful for giving time order or structure to a sequence of events or points:

- To begin with
- First of all
- Secondly
- Then
- After this
- Finally
- In the end
- Last of all

## 7. Classification

If you need to explain something in a different way or clarify a point, you can use phrases like this:

- What I mean is
- Look at it this way
- In other words
- If I'm not mistaken
- To be clear
- This is to say that
- For the avoidance of doubt

## 8. Emphasis

Sometimes you need to emphasize a particular point when speaking or writing. In these cases, the following emphasis discourse markers are useful:

- As a matter of fact
- Indeed
- Actually
- I must admit
- To be honest
- To tell you the truth
- To say the least

### 1.3 Coherence (in written text and conversation)

Coherence refers to the quality of a text or conversation where all parts logically connect and flow together, making the overall message clear and understandable. In written text, coherence ensures that sentences and paragraphs are logically organized, and ideas transition smoothly from one to another. Similarly, in conversation, coherence involves maintaining a logical progression of topics and ideas, allowing participants to understand each other's contributions and follow the discussion effectively (Renkema, 2004, p. 108).



Example in written text: "In her essay, the author used clear topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph to establish coherence. Additionally, she employed transitional words and phrases such as 'furthermore' and 'in contrast' to link related ideas and ensure a smooth flow of information."

Example in conversation: "During the meeting, each speaker built upon the previous points, ensuring coherence in the discussion. When transitioning to a new topic, they used phrases like 'building on what was mentioned earlier' to maintain clarity and coherence in the conversation."

#### 1.4 Importance of coherence in written text and conversation

Coherence plays a crucial role in both written text and conversation, ensuring effective communication and understanding. The following key points highlight importance of coherence in written text and conversation:

1. **Clarity of Message:** Coherence helps to convey ideas and information clearly, making it easier for the reader or listener to understand the intended message. In written text, coherence ensures that sentences and paragraphs flow logically, while in conversation, it helps speakers organize their thoughts to express themselves clearly (Paltridge, 2006, p.50). For example:

- **Written Text:** In an essay, clear coherence ensures that each paragraph flows logically into the next, allowing the reader to follow the author's argument without confusion.
- **Conversation:** During a group discussion, coherence ensures that each participant's contributions build upon previous points, leading to a cohesive exchange of ideas.

2. **Enhanced Comprehension:** A coherent text or conversation is more accessible to the audience, leading to improved comprehension. When ideas are presented in a logical sequence with clear connections, readers and listeners can follow the discussion more easily, leading to better understanding of the content (Major, 2020, p. 45). For example:

- **Written Text:** A well-organized research paper presents findings in a coherent manner, enabling readers to understand complex information and draw meaningful conclusions.
- **Conversation:** In a classroom lecture, a coherent explanation of a concept helps students grasp the material more easily and engage in informed discussion.

3.**Engagement:** Coherent writing and conversation hold the audience's attention by maintaining a sense of continuity and relevance. Well-structured texts and conversations are more engaging, as they guide the audience through a cohesive narrative or argument without causing confusion or disinterest (Schiffrin,1987, p. 60):

. For example:

- **Written Text:** A captivating novel maintains coherence throughout the storyline, holding readers' interest as they follow the plot twists and character developments.
- **Conversation:** A lively debate maintains coherence by staying on topic and addressing relevant points, keeping participants engaged and contributing to the discussion.

4.**Effective Communication:** Coherence facilitates effective communication by ensuring that the intended message is transmitted accurately and efficiently. In both written and spoken communication, coherence enables the sender to express their ideas in a manner that resonates with the audience, fostering meaningful interactions and exchanges of information (Fullan and Quinn, 2016, p. 56). For example:

- **Written Text:** A coherent business proposal presents key points clearly and persuasively, allowing decision-makers to understand the proposal's benefits and make informed choices.
- **Conversation:** During a job interview, coherent responses to questions demonstrate the candidate's ability to articulate ideas effectively and convey their qualifications.

**5. Professionalism and Credibility:** Coherent writing and conversation reflect positively on the competence and professionalism of the communicator. Whether in academic papers, business documents, or interpersonal discussions, coherence demonstrates a level of organization and attention to detail that enhances the credibility of the speaker or writer (Bublitz, Lenk, and Ventola, 1999, p. 32). For example:

- **Written Text:** A well-structured report with coherent sections and subheadings reflects positively on the author's professionalism and attention to detail.
- **Conversation:** In a professional meeting, coherent communication among team members fosters a sense of competence and reliability, enhancing the group's credibility.

**6. Building Rapport:** In conversation, coherence helps to establish rapport and foster connection between speakers. When participants in a conversation demonstrate coherence by actively listening, responding appropriately, and maintaining the flow of discussion, it creates a positive atmosphere conducive to collaboration and relationship-building (Jucker and Zif, 1998, p. 39). For example:

- **Written Text:** In an email exchange, maintaining coherence in responses demonstrates active listening and understanding, contributing to positive communication and rapport.
- **Conversation:** During a casual conversation, coherent storytelling and attentive listening help participants connect and establish a rapport, leading to enjoyable interactions.

## 2. Contribution of discourse markers to coherence in written text

Discourse markers play a crucial role in enhancing coherence in written text by signaling relationships between ideas, guiding readers through the text, and helping to maintain the flow of information. There are some ways where discourse markers contribute to coherence in written text (Aijmer, 2002, p.57):

1. **Sequential Order:** Discourse markers help indicate the sequence of ideas or events in a text, making it easier for readers to follow the narrative or argument.
  - Example: "Firstly, we will discuss the causes of climate change. Secondly, we will examine its environmental impacts."
2. **Transition:** Discourse markers facilitate smooth transitions between different parts of the text, ensuring that the connection between ideas is clear.
  - Example: "However, despite these challenges, there are potential solutions that can be implemented."
3. **Addition:** Discourse markers signal the addition of information or ideas, allowing for the expansion of the topic without causing confusion.
  - Example: "Furthermore, recent studies have shown a correlation between exercise and mental health."
4. **Contrast:** Discourse markers highlight contrasting ideas or viewpoints, providing balance and depth to the discussion.
  - Example: "On the one hand, technology has revolutionized communication. On the other hand, it has also led to concerns about privacy."
5. **Conclusion:** Discourse markers signal the conclusion of a section or the entire text, summarizing key points and providing closure.

- Example: "In conclusion, the findings suggest that further research is needed to fully understand the long-term effects of social media on adolescents."

These examples illustrate how discourse markers such as "firstly," "however," "furthermore," "on the one hand," and "in conclusion" contribute to coherence in written text by organizing information, guiding readers through the text, and clarifying relationships between ideas.

### **3. Contribution of discourse markers to coherence in conversation**

Discourse markers play a crucial role in maintaining coherence in conversation by facilitating smooth transitions between topics, clarifying relationships between ideas, managing turn-taking, and signaling speaker intentions. Here are some ways discourse markers contribute to coherence in conversation (Taboada and Gómez-González, 2012):

#### 1. Topic Maintenance (Givón, 1983, p. 15):

- Discourse markers like "Well," "Anyway," or "So," help speakers introduce new topics or maintain the current topic of conversation. For example:
  - "Well, let's move on to the next item on the agenda."
  - "Anyway, as I was saying earlier..."

#### 2. Turn-Taking (Sidnell, 2010, p. 36):

- Discourse markers such as "So," "Well," or "Um," signal the end of one speaker's turn and the beginning of another's. They help manage the flow of conversation and prevent interruptions. For instance:
  - Speaker A: "So, what are your thoughts on the new project proposal?"
  - Speaker B: "Well, I believe..."

3. Agreement or Disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984, p.57):

- Discourse markers like "Yes, but," "I see your point, however," or "On the contrary," indicate agreement or disagreement with the previous speaker's statement, contributing to coherence by acknowledging differing viewpoints. For example:
  - "Yes, but have you considered the potential drawbacks?"
  - "I see your point; however, I believe..."

4. Transitioning Between Ideas (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 279):

- Discourse markers such as "Anyway," "Moving on," or "Back to the topic," help transition smoothly between different ideas or subtopics within the conversation, maintaining coherence by connecting related thoughts. For instance:
  - "Anyway, let's discuss the budget implications."
  - "Moving on, I'd like to address another aspect of the proposal."

5. Acknowledging Listener Response (Heritage and Raymond, 2005, p. 18):

- Discourse markers like "Right," "Okay," or "Got it," signal acknowledgment of the listener's response, reinforcing understanding and ensuring clarity in the conversation. For example:
  - "Right, I understand your concerns."
  - "Okay, let's proceed with that plan."

Thus, by using discourse markers effectively, speakers can guide the flow of conversation, enhance comprehension, and ensure coherence by signaling transitions, managing interactions, and clarifying relationships between ideas.

#### **4. Exploring similarities and differences in coherence: Written text versus conversation**

##### **4.1 Similarities in coherence: Written text versus conversation:**

There are two main differences between coherence in written text and conversation (Brown &

Yule, 1983, p.14):

##### **1.Logical Flow of Ideas:**

Both written text and conversation require a logical flow of ideas to ensure coherence. In both cases, ideas should be organized in a way that allows the reader or listener to follow the intended message easily.

Example: In written text, paragraphs are structured logically, with each paragraph focusing on a specific idea or topic and transitioning smoothly to the next. In conversation, participants often use discourse markers like "firstly," "secondly," "finally," etc., to signal the sequence of ideas and maintain coherence.

##### **2.Use of Transitional Devices:**

Both written text and conversation employ transitional devices to connect ideas and maintain coherence. Transitional words, phrases, and discourse markers help to establish relationships between sentences or utterances.

Example: In written text, transitional words like "however," "therefore," and "consequently" are used to indicate logical relationships between ideas. In conversation, phrases like "on the other hand," "in addition to that," and "moreover" serve a similar purpose by signaling shifts in topic or introducing new information.

#### 4.2 Differences in coherence: Written text versus conversation:

There are three main differences between coherence in written text and

Conversation (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 77):

1. **Medium of Communication:** The most obvious difference between coherence in written text and conversation is the medium of communication. Written text is static and typically involves a single author presenting information to a reader, whereas conversation is dynamic and involves multiple participants engaging in real-time interaction.

Example: In written text, the author has time to carefully craft sentences and paragraphs to ensure coherence without the pressure of immediate response. In conversation, coherence must be maintained on the fly, with participants adapting their speech in response to each other's contributions.

2. **Formality and Structure:** Written text tends to be more formal and structured compared to conversation. In written text, there are often explicit expectations regarding organization, grammar, and punctuation, whereas conversation is typically more spontaneous and informal.

Example: Written text, such as academic essays or reports, follows specific conventions of formatting, citation, and language usage. Conversation, on the other hand, may involve interruptions, digressions, and colloquial language that would be considered inappropriate in formal writing.

3. **Audience and Context:** The audience and context of written text and conversation can vary significantly, influencing the level of detail, complexity, and tone of communication.

Example: Written text may be intended for a broad audience and therefore requires clarity and explicitness to ensure comprehension. In contrast, conversation often occurs between individuals with shared background knowledge and may involve implicit understanding or context-specific references.



By understanding these similarities and differences, communicators can effectively make changes to what is being communicated, how it is being communicated, or the manner in which it is being communicated in order to better fit the medium (written text or conversation) and the intended purpose or audience.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research provides a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between discourse markers and coherence in both written text and conversation. By highlighting the crucial role of discourse markers as transitional devices, we have explored how they help to create a smooth and uninterrupted progression of ideas within communication, ensuring that the transition between different parts of the discourse is effortless and natural.

Moreover, our analysis has emphasized the differences in how discourse markers are used and their functions in various communicative contexts.

This study contributes to linguistic analysis and also offers practical insights into enhancing effective communication strategies. In the future, more research in this area can help us better understand how discourse markers work and how they affect language and communication.

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