

USE GUIDING LANGUAGE

When you created your outline and wrote your first draft, you had to decide which ideas to include and how to organize each section so that the ideas would flow logically from one point to the next. This organization may now be clear to you, but not necessarily to your reader.

To lead your reader from one idea to the next, you can use guiding language – words, phrases, and sentences – that clarify the connections. Paragraphs are a good starting point for a review of your guiding language. Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence, followed by sentences that add ideas or develop the paragraph’s focus. As you review these sentences, consider how they develop the central idea of the paragraph and whether this is easy for the reader to follow.

In the following paragraph from an essay on standardized testing, the writer uses sentences to explain a reason, to give evidence, to provide examples, and to present an alternative perspective. She uses guiding language to help make some of these functions clearer. In addition, her use of documentation lets the reader know when she had provided outside evidence.

The functions of the sentences are noted in the margin, and the guiding language the writer uses is in bold.

Guiding Words and Phrases

Topic sentence	→	It has been argued that standardized testing motivated students to work harder. When students face the pressure of achieving a certain test score, they are forced to work hard. They know that they will not be able to progress towards their goal without that test score. In “A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,” Rotbert (2011) noted that teachers and students feel an obligation to improve their standardized test scores. They feel that the test score is the primary measure that others will use to judge their ability and so they place a great deal of effort into achieving the highest score possible.	←	Explains a reason
Provides an alternative perspective	→	However , under the pressure of test scores, they may work harder, but they don’t work deeply. In “Standardized Testing: A Defense,” Ashworth (1990) admitted that “when it comes to figuring out the system, most students learn to be con artists” (p.71). In other words , they avoid learning their school subjects and focus only on test-taking strategies that they think will help them beat the test.	←	Explains outside evidence
Provides example	→	For example , they study patterns of questions and methods for quickly finding answers. Their goal is to get high scores on tests, and they don’t care where their answers come from. They also don’t focus on subjects that are not covered by tests such as art and current events (Kohn, 2000).	←	Provides additional idea with an example
Summarizes the point	→	Thus , standardized testing may motivate students to study intensely, but the quality of education doesn't improve because students’ efforts reflect only a shallow approach to learning.		

Notice how the words the writer chooses help to guide the reader through the topic of this paragraph. You can do the same by using signal words and phrases that guide your readers.

Common Academic Signal Words & Phrases

Kind of Phrase	Example 1	Example 2
<p>Phrases to signal an example</p>	<p><i>For example,</i></p> <p>Students avoid learning their school subjects and focus only on test-taking strategies that they think will help them beat the test. <i>For example,</i> they study patterns of test questions and methods for quickly finding answers.</p>	<p>General point + <i>such as</i> + noun</p> <p>Students avoid learning their school subjects and focus only on test-taking strategies that they think will help them beat the test <i>such as</i> studying patterns of test questions and methods for quickly finding answers.</p>
<p>Phrases to signal an alternative perspective</p>	<p><i>However,</i> + alternative perspective</p> <p>Students feel that the test score is the primary measure that others will use to judge their ability, and they place a great deal of effort into achieving the highest score possible. <i>However,</i> under the pressure of tests, they may work harder, but they don't work deeply.</p>	<p><i>Although</i> [first perspective], + alternative perspective</p> <p><i>Although</i> students may feel that the test score is the how others will judge their ability and they will word hard to achieve the highest score possible, under this pressure they may work hard, but they don't work deeply.</p>
<p>Phrases to signal possible objections to an idea</p>	<p><i>Some might argue that</i> + objection</p> <p>The students' goal is to get high scores on tests, and they don't care where their answers come from. <i>Some might argue that</i> this approach to learning leads to shallow thinking.</p>	<p><i>Opponents of this point might state that</i> + objection</p> <p>The students' goal is to get high scores on tests, and they don't care where their answers come from. <i>Opponents of this point might state that</i> this approach to learning leads to shallow thinking.</p>
<p>Phrases to signal a discussion about the cause of something</p>	<p>X happens. <i>Therefore,</i> Y happens.</p> <p>Students feel pressure to achieve a high score on standardized tests; <i>therefore,</i> the tests motivate them to study harder.</p>	<p><i>When</i> X, Y happens.</p> <p><i>When</i> students feel pressure to achieve a high score on standardized tests, they are motivated to study harder.</p>

Kind of Phrase	Example 1	Example 2
Phrases to signal an elaboration or interpretation of outside evidence.	<p><i>In other words, + sentence</i></p> <p>In “Standardized Testing: A Defense,” Ashworth (1990) admitted that “when it comes to figuring out the system, most students learn to be con artists” (p. 71). <i>In other words</i>, they avoid learning their school subjects and focus only on test-taking strategies that they think will help them beat the test.</p>	<p><i>[Author]’s point is that, what [author] means is that</i></p> <p>In “Standardized Testing: A Defense,” Ashworth (1990) admitted that “when it comes to figuring out the system, most students learn to be con artists” (p. 71). <i>Ashworth’s point is that</i> students avoid learning their school subjects and focus only on test-taking strategies that they think will help them beat the test.</p>
Phrases to signal an elaboration of a point you are making with a slight shift in focus	<p>Subject + <i>also</i> + verb</p> <p>Their goal is to get as high a score as possible on the test and they don’t care where their answers come from. Students with this perspective <i>also</i> don’t take time to study subjects that are not in the test.</p>	<p><i>In addition,</i></p> <p>Their goal is to get as high a score as possible on the test and they don’t care where their answers come from. <i>In addition</i>, students with this perspective don’t take time to study subjects that are not in the test.</p>
Phrases to signal a summary of your point	<p><i>Thus, + summary</i></p> <p><i>Thus</i>, standardized testing may motivate students to study intensely, but the quality of education doesn’t improve because students’ efforts reflect only a shallow approach to learning.</p>	<p><i>The point/issue/problem is that + summary</i></p> <p><i>The issue is that</i> standardized testing may motivate students to study intensely, but the quality of education doesn’t improve because students’ efforts reflect only a shallow approach to learning.</p>

While transition signals are useful, your writing will be smoother if you do not overuse this guiding language technique. A well-developed paragraph with plenty of explanatory details and a few well-chosen transition signals will do the best job of helping your readers understand your meaning. In fact, an overuse of transition signals, coupled with a lack of explanatory details, can actually make writing feel choppy and less cohesive.

Guiding Sentences

In addition to single words and short phrases, **full sentences** can also be used to show your reader how ideas are related. These guiding sentences can be used to signal transitions within paragraphs, and they are also helpful in leading your reader from one paragraph to the next.

In the following paragraph excerpt, the sentence in bold leads the reader to the next idea that will be discussed in the paragraph.

Guiding Sentence within Paragraph

One reason young people commit suicide is because of pressures from their daily lives. According to Merritt (2000), growing up is more stressful today than it's ever been before. Merritt wrote "the cumulative weight of life's stresses makes growing up a difficult experience for many young people, one that can seem overwhelming to some" (p. 89). **Family conflict and school pressure are two examples of issues young people often find difficult to deal with.**

In this paragraph, the writer mentions two examples – family conflict and school pressure – that he will discuss to illustrate his point about the stresses in a young person's life that might lead to suicide. By including this guiding sentence that summarizes what he will explain next, the writer prepares the reader for the information he will include in the rest of his paragraph.

In this example from an essay on heroes, the last sentence of the paragraph points toward the focus of the next paragraph.

Guiding Sentences between Paragraphs

End of Paragraph:	Basically, heroes live for ideals and their principles function as a catalyst that motivates society. However, <u>sometimes a hero's ideas conflict with some members of society.</u>
Topic Sentence of Next Paragraph:	<u>Because heroes must often face some opposition to their ideals and their effort to change society,</u> they must also be brave, a second characteristic of heroes.

Here the writer introduces the idea about heroes and conflict at the end of one paragraph. In the next paragraph, he begins the topic sentence with a direct connection to this idea of conflict before leading his reader to his paragraph's focus that heroes must be brave.

Now You Try:

Read and discuss the following introductory paragraph of a paper on cross-cultural conflicts and adjustment. Identify the guiding words & phrases, the guiding sentences, and discuss whether you think the student used guiding language effectively in this paragraph.

Introduction:

“What a wonderful country. The people are so friendly. I love it here.” These are the expressions that a newcomer student says after two weeks in the host country. In contrast, “they do everything backward. I can’t make friends” and “I miss my home country” are also expressions from a newcomer student, but after four months in the host country. This is what students normally say during their experience studying abroad. When a person decides to study abroad, he expects that the experience will be enjoyable and beneficial; however, he may not see beyond this optimistic expectation. There are many challenging issues a student can face while studying abroad. For example, there are financial, transportation, and housing challenges. Also, there is the language issue that some people consider the most difficult. Furthermore, cultural values and norms in the new country may also cause some difficulties for students. In fact, culture shock and reverse culture shock are two unexpected challenges that students might face during their experience studying abroad.

What guiding words & phrases do you see? What about guiding sentences?

Do you think the student effectively used guiding language? Why or why not?