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Linking words

Linking words show how one idea connects to another: addition, contrast, reason, result, example or sequence. In IELTS Writing Task 2 and Speaking, choose a linking word only when the relationship is real, punctuate it correctly, and avoid using one in every sentence.

What to know

What linking words do

A linking word tells the reader how two ideas relate. Without it, the reader has to guess. With the wrong one, the reader is misled. This is why accuracy matters more than the number of linking words you use.

The main types

Group linking words by the job they do. Learn two or three in each group, and use them well.

- Addition: in addition, also, moreover, furthermore
- Contrast: however, although, whereas, in contrast, on the other hand
- Reason: because, since, as, due to
- Result: therefore, as a result, consequently, so
- Example: for example, for instance, such as

Punctuation and position

Linking adverbs at the start of a sentence are followed by a comma: However, the cost is high. As a result, fewer people drive. In the middle of a sentence, put them between two commas or after a semicolon: The cost is high; however, many people still pay it.

Using them accurately

Check the meaning first. However, but and although show contrast, so they must join two ideas that really contrast. Therefore and as a result show a result, so the second idea must be a consequence of the first. Moreover and in addition add a similar point, and they do not fit a contrast.

Avoiding overuse

Many learners memorise a list and put one in every sentence: Firstly, Secondly, Moreover, In addition, Furthermore. This makes the writing sound mechanical, and it can hide weak ideas. Use a linking word when the connection is not already obvious, and leave it out when the order of ideas is clear.

Exercises

1. The city has good transport. _____, it is expensive to live there.
 - a. Therefore
 - b. However
 - c. Moreover
2. Pollution has increased. _____, many people now cycle to work.

- a. As a result
 - b. In contrast
 - c. For instance
3. Many cities are crowded. _____, Cairo is very busy at rush hour.
- a. Despite
 - b. For example
 - c. Although
4. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) Online learning is flexible. (2) Therefore, (3) it can also be (4) lonely.
5. Begin with Despite. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): Although / the high cost, / many students / choose to study abroad. / Despite
6. Correct this: *Despite of the rain, we walked to the campus.*
7. She did not revise. _____, she failed the test.
- a. Consequently
 - b. Whereas
 - c. However
8. _____ it was raining, the match went ahead.
- a. However
 - b. Even though
 - c. Despite
9. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) Car ownership is rising. (2) On contrast, (3) public transport use (4) is falling.
10. I enjoyed the film, _____ the story was a little slow.
- a. although
 - b. despite
 - c. however

Practise online, free: hear every example and check your answers at www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/linking-words/practice/

IELTS tip. In Writing Task 2, use a few well-chosen linking words where the relationship is not obvious, and check punctuation after each one. In Speaking, rely on because, so, but, although and which to extend your answers, and add for example when you give an example.

FOR TEACHERS · GRAMMAR

Linking words

AIM	Learners choose linking words for their meaning and form, punctuate them correctly and use them sparingly.
TIME	35 minutes
LEVEL	B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)
MATERIALS	This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio

Warm-up

Give learners a paragraph of six short sentences with no links. Ask them to add links where they think they are needed and then compare.

Lesson steps

1. Sort a list of linking words into groups by function and mark which are conjunctions and which are linking adverbs.
2. Teach the punctuation patterns using three sentences on the board, with the linking word at the start, in the middle and joining two clauses.
3. Run an error-finding task with six sentences containing despite of, on contrast, comma splices and a link that does not fit the meaning.
4. Learners rewrite the first paragraph, using only three linking words and one pronoun reference.

Extension

Learners choose a Task 2 paragraph from their own work, underline every linking word, and delete any that are not needed.

Answer key

1. b) However. The second sentence contrasts with the first, so however fits. Therefore shows a result, and moreover adds a similar point.
2. a) As a result. Cycling is a consequence of pollution here, so as a result fits.
3. b) For example. The second sentence gives an example, and although and despite need a different structure.
4. Part 2: *Therefore*, → **However**. The second idea adds a drawback, so a contrast word is needed.
5. Despite the high cost, many students choose to study abroad. Despite is followed by a noun phrase, and the main clause follows after the comma.
6. Despite the rain, we walked to the campus. Despite is not followed by of. In spite of is the longer form.
7. a) Consequently. Failing is the result of not revising, so consequently fits. However shows contrast, and whereas does not start a separate sentence.

8. b) Even though. Even though is followed by a full clause. Despite would need a noun phrase.
9. Part 2: *On contrast*, → **In contrast**,. The fixed phrase is in contrast.
10. a) although. Although is followed by a clause and joins it to the first one. However needs a new sentence.

Questions learners often ask

How many linking words should I use in an essay? There is no set number. Use one when the relationship between ideas is not already clear, and avoid putting one in every sentence.

Is however the same as but? Both show contrast, but however starts a new sentence and is followed by a comma, while but joins two clauses in one sentence.

Can I use firstly and secondly? Yes, but do not use them mechanically. Often a topic sentence is a clearer way to organise your ideas.

Do linking words matter in Speaking? Yes. Short links such as because, although and which keep your answers connected. Formal written links sound unnatural in speech.

Sources

- Swan, M. (2016). Practical English Usage (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S. and Finegan, E. (1999). Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. Longman.
- Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. (2006). Cambridge Grammar of English. Cambridge University Press.

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