

Lesson Plan: Using Signal Words and Phrases

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Lesson: Using Signal Words and Phrases

Timeframe: 60 minutes

Target Audience: Upper-division university students, both second-language learners and native speakers

Materials needed: Laptop, LCD projector, PowerPoint presentation, whiteboard or blackboard and markers, handout, writing materials for students, homework assignment sheet

Objectives: After the lesson, students will be able to

- recognize signal words and phrases,
- incorporate signal words and phrases in their writing, and
- consider structural relationships in their writing more carefully.

Background: Often student writers do not fully take into account what a writer owes his or her reader. Among other things, they struggle with establishing clear and meaningful relationships among the ideas they are presenting and with helping the reader easily grasp such relationships. This lesson focuses on the use of transitional words and phrases—so-called signal words and phrases—to show the reader that the writer is shifting to a different time or place or setting up, developing, challenging, or summarizing a set of ideas.

Introduction to Lesson [5 minutes]:

- Start the PowerPoint presentation. Give students the following information.
 - Slide 1: Today we are going to work with signal words and phrases, which are also called transitional words and phrases.
 - Slide 2: All semester, we have been saying that good writing serves its readers. Even when you are writing about yourself, your writing must attend to your readers' needs, not to your own. Keep thinking about the following questions:
 - Who are my readers?
 - What do they know?
 - What *don't* they know?
 - What more can I do to help them understand and follow what I am saying?
 - Slide 3: There are many ways to serve your readers. One way is by using signal words and phrases.
 - Slide 4: Think for a minute about driving. When traffic situations are complex, good drivers use turn signals to let other drivers know their intentions.

- Slide 5: Road signals tell other drivers where you are going. *Similarly*, signal words tell your readers where you are going. When writing relationships are complex, good writers use signal words and phrases to help readers follow without having to stop and puzzle out the relationships. Here are some examples of signal words and phrases: “as a result,” “nevertheless,” “at the same time,” and “similarly.”

Yes, I have used a signal word here (“similarly”) to let you know that I am about to point out something that is like using turn signals.

A signal word picks up an element in the previous sentence and shows where you intend to take it.

Procedure [45 minutes]:

Step 1: Read and discuss two texts [10 minutes]

- Hand out the two texts about making banana pizza and ask students to read them. Meanwhile, show Slide 6.
- Ask students which of the two texts is better and why. In the short discussion that follows, you want students to realize that not only is the text on Side B easier to read, but it also helps the reader better understand the process of making the pizza.
- Show PowerPoint Slides 7 and 8 (which are identical to the second text) and ask students to explain what kinds of relationships are set up by the signal words and phrases.
 - sequence [*first, then, next, finally*]
 - contrast [*alternately, but, however*]
 - emphasis [*in fact, yes*]
 - time [*meanwhile*]
 - likeness [*equally good*]
 - summary [*finally*]

Note to instructor: The categories of signal words and phrases are consistently color-coded on the PowerPoint slides. For example, words and phrases that signal contrast are orange. The color-coding will help some students better connect the concept with the actual words and phrases.

Step 2: Continue PowerPoint presentation [5 minutes]

- Slide 9: Read each category aloud and ask different students to read the examples of signal words and phrases.* Ask students if they can add another signal word or phrase to each category. For example, in the first category, “time,” they might add “at the same time.”

- Slide 10: Read the text. Explain the transition we are now making in our class discussion: we are adding to our discussion of using signal words and phrases in a process piece (such as making a banana pizza) and also talking about using signal words in an argumentative piece.
- Slide 11: Ask a student volunteer to read the text. Once this task has been completed, explain to students that argumentation—in which the writer takes a position and tries to convince others of its correctness—is a particularly complex type of writing. It can involve many strategies. The writer must present reasons why his or her argument is correct and support those reasons using examples, statistics, analogies, and so on. He or she must also acknowledge and address potential objections.

Given all this complexity, it is vital to use signal words and phrases in argumentative writing.

Step 3: Ask students to write and peer-review a paragraph using signal words and phrases [15 minutes]

- Project Slide 12 so the students can view the list of common signal words and phrases.
- Ask each student to write a paragraph that uses signal words and phrases. This paragraph should explain a process: how to make a work of art or craft using a particular medium (like photography, papier-mâché, watercolor, etc.). Write these instructions on the whiteboard.
- Before students begin, provide the following information:
 - Tell them to try to use as many different kinds of signal words and phrases as possible.
 - Remind them that a signal word or phrase does not have to come at the beginning of a sentence. It can come in the middle or at the end.
 - Also tell them to consider the *right* signal word or phrase. For instance, “however” and “on the other hand” both signal contrasts, but they do not mean exactly the same thing. “However” shows that you are about to contradict (or partly contradict) what you have just said. “On the one hand” and “on the other hand” stress the fact that you are presenting two opposing ideas.

Both “in conclusion” and “all in all” introduce a summary, but “in conclusion” is appropriate for a formal presentation, while “all in all” is appropriate for more informal writing.

- After students have finished their paragraphs, ask each student to exchange paragraphs with a partner. Each student should read his or her partner's paragraph, circle the signal words and phrases, and discuss their effectiveness and/or possible additions or improvements.

Step 4: Ask students to write and peer-review a second paragraph using signal words and phrases [15 minutes]

- Ask each student to write a second paragraph that uses signal words and phrases. This paragraph should make an argument: Facebook is—or is not—a waste of time. Write these instructions on the whiteboard.
- After students have finished their paragraphs, ask each student to exchange paragraphs with a different partner. Each student should read his or her partner's paragraph, circle the signal words and phrases, and discuss their effectiveness and/or possible additions or improvements.

Step 5: Have volunteers read their paragraphs aloud [3 minutes]

- Ask two or three volunteers to read their paragraphs aloud.
- Discuss each example after it has been read to the class, focusing on the signal words and phrases that the author used in the paragraph.

Conclusion/Evaluation [2 minutes]:

- Wrap up the lesson by telling students that signal words are an excellent tool that can help both writer and reader map out relationships in writing.
- Hand out the homework assignment sheet, which asks students to write sentences that address each of the twelve possible relationships discussed in this lesson.

Lesson Analysis:

Although students already use certain signal words and phrases, most will not have thought about them as such. Putting a name and a spotlight on this type of word or phrase helps students focus on both the terms themselves and the relationships they help clarify. The lesson will encourage them to use signal words and phrases more effectively, to venture beyond their usual word patterns, and to keep their readers in mind. The lesson would be most effective if presented while students are working on an argumentative paper. In any case, it is a lesson that requires much reinforcement, including positive reinforcement, during the writing assignments that follow.

*Examples of signal words and phrases adapted from Frederick Crews, *The Random House Handbook* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992).

How to Make Banana Pizza

Some people love banana pizza. It sounds crazy. Almost everyone who's tried it is a fan. Banana pizza is wildly popular in Sweden.

Here's how to make it.

Dissolve a package of yeast and one teaspoon of sugar in 1 cup of warm water. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of canola oil and a dash of salt. Slowly stir in $3\frac{1}{2}$ cups of flour. A soft dough will form.

Pre-heat the oven to 450° F.

Transfer the dough to a floured surface and knead it until it becomes smooth and elastic. Put it in a bowl, cover, and set the bowl in a warm place. In about 45 minutes, it will double.

Press half the dough onto a greased 12" pizza pan. You must decide if you want to make a savory pizza or a sweet pizza.

For a savory pizza, spread the dough with tomato sauce. Add banana slices and top with curry powder. You may want to use other ingredients, smoked cheese or ham.

You can make a sweet pizza. Spread the dough with smooth peanut butter. Follow with banana slices and sprinkle with brown sugar. Top with crushed peanuts or maple syrup.

Bake for about ten minutes. Eat!

How to Make Banana Pizza

Some people love banana pizza. Yes, it sounds crazy. However, almost everyone who's tried it is a fan. In fact, banana pizza is wildly popular in Sweden.

Here's how to make it.

First, dissolve a package of yeast and one teaspoon of sugar in 1 cup of warm water. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of canola oil and a dash of salt. Slowly stir in $3\frac{1}{2}$ cups of flour. A soft dough will form.

Meanwhile, pre-heat the oven to 450° F.

Then transfer the dough to a floured surface and knead it until it becomes smooth and elastic. Put it in a bowl, cover, and set the bowl in a warm place. In about 45 minutes, it will double.

Next, press half the dough onto a greased 12" pizza pan. Now you must decide if you want to make a savory pizza or a sweet pizza.

For a savory pizza, spread the dough with tomato sauce. Add banana slices and top with curry powder. You may want to use other ingredients, smoked cheese and/or ham, for example.

Alternately, you can make a sweet pizza. Spread the dough with smooth peanut butter. Follow with banana slices and sprinkle with brown sugar. Top with crushed peanuts or, equally good, maple syrup.

Bake for about ten minutes. Finally, eat!

Using Signal Words and Phrases

Due date:

Point total:

The purpose of this assignment is to practice using signal words and phrases, which are excellent tools for clarifying the relationships among the ideas you are presenting and thus better serving your reader.

For each of kind of relationship listed below, write two sentences that include a signal word or phrase. Label each pair of sentences and underline the signal word or phrase.

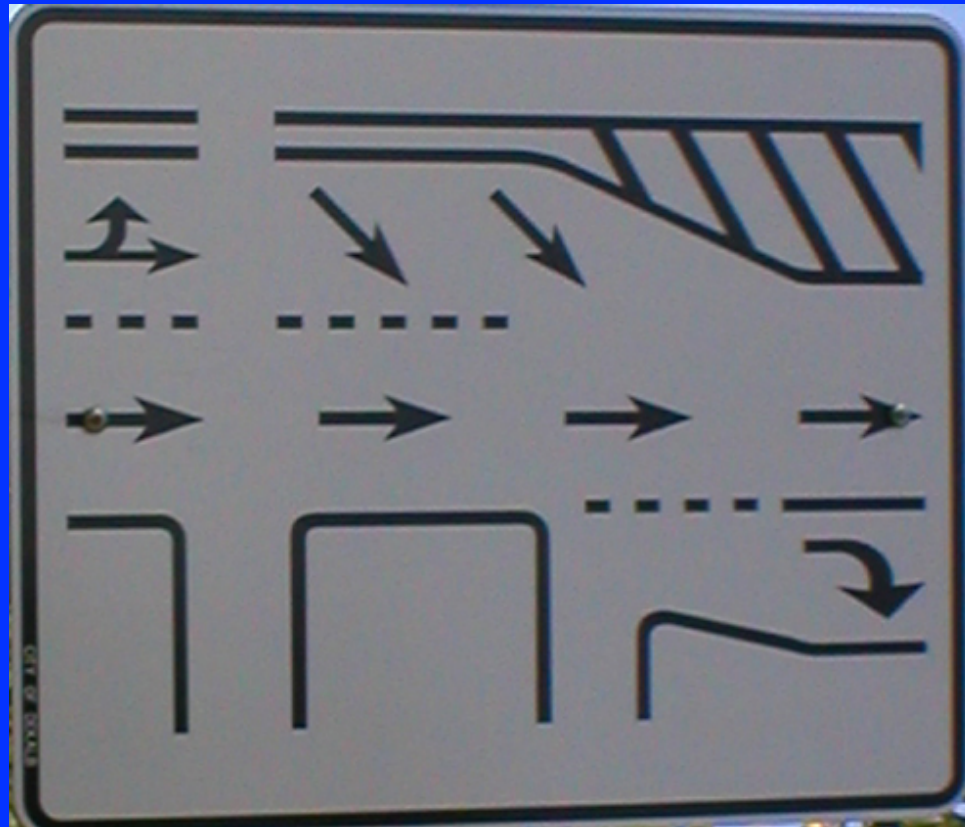
For example:

Example: George disliked their new furniture. For one thing, the bed was three inches too short for his six-foot-tall body.

Consequence: Customers are having major problems with the new app. As a result, the stock value of the company has plummeted.

1. Time
2. Place
3. Example
4. Contrast
5. Sequence
6. Amplification
7. Emphasis
8. Restatement
9. Concession
10. Likeness
11. Consequence
12. Summary

Using Signal Words and Phrases (also called transitional words and phrases)



Good writing serves its readers.



One way to serve your reader is by using
signal words and phrases.



When traffic situations are complex,



good drivers use turn signals to let other drivers know their intentions.



Similarly, when writing
relationships are complex,



good writers use signal words and phrases to help readers
follow without having to stop and puzzle out the relationships.

as a result...

nevertheless...

at the same time...

similarly...



How to Make Banana Pizza

Some people love banana pizza. **Yes**, it sounds crazy. **However**, almost everyone who's tried it is a fan. **In fact**, banana pizza is wildly popular in Sweden.

Here's how to make it.

First, dissolve a package of yeast and one teaspoon of sugar in 1 cup of warm water. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of canola oil and a dash of salt. Slowly stir in $3\frac{1}{2}$ cups of flour. A soft dough will form.

Meanwhile, pre-heat the oven to 450° F.

Then transfer the dough to a floured surface and knead it until it becomes smooth and elastic. Put it in a bowl, cover, and set the bowl in a warm place. In about 45 minutes, it will double.

Next, press half the dough onto a greased 12” pizza pan. **Now** you must decide if you want to make a savory pizza or a sweet pizza.

For a savory pizza, spread the dough with tomato sauce. Add banana slices and top with curry powder. You may want to use other ingredients, smoked cheese and/or ham, **for example**.

Alternately, you can make a sweet pizza. Spread the dough with peanut butter. Follow with banana slices and sprinkle with brown sugar. Top with crushed peanuts or, **equally good**, maple syrup.

Bake for ten minutes. **Finally**, eat!

Examples of Signal Words and Phrases

Time: afterward, later, earlier, formerly...

Place: elsewhere, here, above, below, farther on...

Example: for instance, for example, for one thing...

Contrast: however, but, on the other hand...

Sequence: first, second, next, finally...

Amplification: again, in addition, furthermore...

Emphasis: in fact, yes, no, indeed...

Restatement: in other words, that is, by way of explanation...

Concession: granted, of course, to be sure...

Likeness: similarly, equally important...

Consequence: thus, therefore, consequently...

Summary: in short, hence, in summary...

Signal words and phrases are helpful
in explaining a process
like how to make banana pizza.

They're also helpful
in building an argument.

Examples of signal words and phrases from a paper arguing that GMOs should be banned:

Moreover, GMOs should be banned because they threaten biodiversity. **[Here you show that you are adding a reason why.]**

Granted, GMOs require less fertilizer and result in higher yields than do crops that have not been genetically altered. **[Here you show that you are conceding a point to the opposite side.]**

In India, **for instance**, the use of insect-resistant cotton has brought yields over fifty percent higher. **[Here you show that you are giving an example.]**

Yet small farmers, whose seed costs have tripled, are reaping few benefits. **[Here you show that you are making a counter-argument.]**

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