

English Corner



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Cohesion: Correct use of conjunctions

1. On the contrary

On the contrary is often wrongly interpreted as a contrastive connective like *In contrast*, which is not the case. Instead, it is used for emphasis and reinforcement of ideas. Consider the following example:

e.g. Sacking employees may not help save the company. *On the contrary*, it may lead to serious problems that will worsen the situation further.

The above example shows clearly that *on the contrary* is not used to indicate contrast. Note that the first part of the sentence is negative (i.e. *may not help*), and the second part of the sentence emphasizes and elaborates on the meaning conveyed in the first part of the sentence. No contrast is involved.

2. Besides

Besides is also commonly misused. It is used to add a further reason for something, and is more common in speech than in writing. It is suggested that *besides* is often used to present an afterthought – something which you thought of later. Thus using *besides* in formal academic or business writing indicates to the readers that you have not organized your ideas well.

e.g. The business plan must be re-submitted because of the unrealistic strategies. Besides, I don't like the overall idea and direction of the plan.

Besides is used correctly in the example above to introduce a second reason for rejecting the business plan. If you simply want to use an addition connective to join sentences, you could consider *in addition*.

3. Therefore

Using *therefore* to introduce an idea whose truth depends on the idea conveyed in the preceding sentence.

e.g. She knew nothing about the policy. What she did, therefore, could be understood.

If an idea is self-evident and is true by itself, *therefore* should not be used. Look at the following example:

e.g. The problem with capital punishment is that justice sometimes makes mistakes and the wrong person is sometimes convicted. *Therefore* it is unjust to execute an innocent person.

(Dent-Young 1996: 137)



It is true that it is unjust to execute an innocent person, but this truth does not depend on the previous sentence. The writer might perhaps have meant the following:
e.g. The problem with capital punishment is that justice sometimes makes mistakes and the wrong person is sometimes convicted. *Therefore* an innocent person is sometimes executed.

4. In fact

In fact is used to introduce a rather surprising conclusion.

e.g. There is evidence to indicate that it is not the case. *In fact*, it was the government which should be responsible for it.

5. Indeed

When *indeed* is used at the beginning of a sentence, it presents an idea which is similar or stronger than the previous one. It can also be a stronger statement of the same idea.
e.g. What she asked doesn't make sense. *Indeed* such a question is practically meaningless.

Quiz:

1. The following are all used to give examples. Which is the odd one out?
such as, like, namely, for example _____
2. What's wrong with the following sentence?
The proposal about requiring customers to pay for plastic bags sounds feasible, and it is an effective way to save the environment. *Beside*, it reminds the public of what individuals can do to help.
3. Join the following sentences using appropriate conjunctions to show the sentence relationships:
(1) Computers play a key role in our lives. (2) They provide information, recreation, and a network of communication. (3) They lead to addiction, study problems and family problems.

Key:

1. *namely*. All others are used to give examples of a complete list, but *namely* lists all examples in the complete list.
2. *Beside* is a preposition meaning *next to*. *Besides* should be used here instead to introduce a second reason.
3. Computers play a key role in our lives, *as* they provide information, recreation, and a network of communication. *In the meantime, however*, they lead to addiction, study problems and *even* family problems.

References:

Dent-Young, J. (1996). *The Language of English Studies: A Handbook for Advanced Students of English*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
McCarter, S. (2002). *A Book on Writing*. 2nd edition. UK: IntelliGene.