

UNIT 13: CONNECTIVES AND ARGUMENTATION

Business Research Corpus --- 136 articles, ~1,160,000 words

OVERVIEW

Connectives, the words and phrases that signal logical relationships between sentences, are the scaffolding of academic argument. Business research has a distinctive connective profile: adversative connectives dominate at 43.4/10k, followed by causal (34.4/10k), additive (32.2/10k), and sequential (29.1/10k).

This ordering reveals the discipline's argumentative character: business papers spend substantial effort contrasting, qualifying, and pivoting, reflecting the need to position work against existing literature and interpret findings cautiously.

CONNECTIVE FAMILIES

Sequential connectives (29.1/10k): *first, second, third, finally, next, then, subsequently*

Sequential connectives structure the presentation. They number contributions, hypotheses, findings, and implications: "First, we contribute to... Second, we extend... Third, we provide..." This is the simplest structure. Be careful not to overuse it, especially the *first ...*, *second ...*, *third ...* version

Adversative connectives (43.4/10k): *however (10.9/10k), but (12.0/10k), while (9.8/10k), although (4.4/10k), yet (2.6/10k), despite (2.2/10k), nevertheless (1.0/10k), in contrast (0.9/10k)*

Adversative connectives create gaps and qualify claims. They are the workhorses of the Introduction, where they pivot from established knowledge to the limitation your paper addresses.

Causal connectives (34.4/10k): *therefore, thus, hence, consequently, as a result, because, since, accordingly*

Causal connectives connect premises to conclusions. They are most frequent in the Discussion, where they link findings to implications:

“Our results show X. Therefore, managers should consider...”

Additive connectives (32.2/10k): *moreover, furthermore, in addition, additionally, also, indeed, in fact*

Additive connectives accumulate evidence: “Moreover, the effect persists across subgroups...” They strengthen arguments by adding supporting points.

THE ADVERSATIVE PAIR: HOWEVER AND BUT

However (10.9/10k) and *but* (12.0/10k) are the two most common adversative connectives in business writing. They serve similar functions but differ in register:

However is more formal and typically begins a new sentence: “Prior research has examined X in developed markets. However, little is known about X in emerging economies.”

But is less formal and typically connects clauses within a sentence: “The relationship is positive, but not statistically significant.”

Use *however* for major pivots (especially gap-creation). Use *but* for minor qualifications within sentences.

THE PAPER’S ARGUMENTATIVE ARC THROUGH CONNECTIVES

Introduction: Adversative connectives dominate. Their function is gap-creation: they pivot from established knowledge to the limitation your paper addresses. Sequential connectives appear when numbering contributions.

Literature Review: Adversative and additive connectives. Adversative for contrasting different perspectives: “While Smith (2020) argues X, Jones (2019) suggests Y.” Additive for accumulating evidence within a strand.

Methodology: Few connectives. Methodology sections are descriptive, relying on the procedural sequence rather than logical connectives.

Results: Sequential connectives structure the presentation: “First, the descriptive results. Second, the main analysis. Third, the robustness checks.” Additive connectives add supporting findings.

Discussion: Causal and additive connectives dominate: “Therefore, our findings suggest...” / “Moreover, the implications extend to...” Adversative connectives reappear when acknowledging limitations.

COMMON ARGUMENTATION PATTERNS

The “consistent with” pattern: Present a theoretical prediction, then show evidence: “The theory predicts that X increases with Y. Column 3 confirms this prediction.”

The “ruling out” pattern: Present an alternative explanation, then show evidence against it: “One concern is reverse causality. However, the lagged specification produces similar results.”

The “building up” pattern: Present results in sequence, building toward a conclusion: “First, we establish the basic relationship. Second, we control for confounds. Third, we test mechanisms.”

The “compare and contrast” pattern: Compare with previous findings: “Our estimate is consistent with Smith’s (2020) finding, but extends it to a new context.”

THE CONNECTIVE HIERARCHY

Each connective family has a strength hierarchy. Using the right level signals your rhetorical intention:

Adversative (weakest to strongest): *but* → *however* → *although* → *yet* → *nevertheless* → *nonetheless*

Use *but* and *however* for routine contrasts. Use the others sparingly. Reserve *nevertheless* and *nonetheless* for strong concessions where you acknowledge a significant limitation but maintain your position.

Causal (least to most formal): *so* → *because* → *therefore* → *thus* → *hence* → *consequently* → *accordingly*

Use *therefore* and *thus* as default causal connectives. The connectives

hence and *consequently* perhaps work best in formal theoretical derivations.

Additive (weakest to strongest): *also* → *moreover/furthermore* → *indeed/in fact*

Use *moreover* when adding a new piece of evidence. Use *indeed* when the new evidence strengthens a claim already made. Use sparingly. Many papers will not use *indeed*.

SIGNPOSTING

Signposts are explicit markers that tell the reader what is coming: “The key finding is...”, “Three points are worth noting...”, “We turn now to...”

Signposts are particularly important before and after key findings. “The key result in Table 3 is...” gives the reader an interpretive frame. But if every paragraph begins with “Importantly,” the word loses its force.

CONNECTIVE DENSITY AS A DIAGNOSTIC

The corpus average is approximately 139/10k across all connective types combined. If your writing has substantially fewer connectives, it may feel choppy or disconnected. If it has substantially more, it may feel over-signposted.

THE PARAGRAPH AS ARGUMENT UNIT

Each paragraph in a business paper should advance the argument by one step. As noted above, a useful test is whether you can summarise each paragraph in a single sentence? If so, the paragraph is well-focused. If you need two or more sentences, the paragraph may need splitting.

A well-structured paragraph has:

1. A first sentence that states the paragraph’s claim

2. Supporting evidence or reasoning
3. A closing sentence that connects to the next paragraph or states the implication

REVISION CHECKLIST: CONNECTIVES

- * Are logical relationships between sentences explicit when they need to be?
- * Are you using sequential markers to number contributions, hypotheses, and findings?
- * Are adversative connectives creating your research gaps?
- * Is the connective hierarchy used appropriately (*but* → *however* → *nevertheless*)?
- * Are there signposts to highlight key findings?
- * Is connective density appropriate: neither choppy nor over-signposted?
- * Does each paragraph advance the argument by one step?