Note-taking Signal words

The most helpful words while reading are the prepositions and conjunctions that guide your mind along the pathways of the author’s ideas. A word like furthermore says, “keep going.” However says, “this is an exception.” Master these words and phrases, and you will become a better reader, for the words will whisper directions in your inner ear. Below are some examples of these types of words. Listening for these words helps you take more accurate notes. You can probably think of others to add to this list.

**Addition Words:** tell you that the speaker or writer’s thought is going to continue in the same direction. He or she is going to add on more points or details of the same kind.

- Also
- First of all
- Last of all
- Another
- For one thing
- Likewise
- Finally
- Furthermore
- Moreover
- First
- In addition
- Next
- And
- Second
- The third reason

**Alternative Words:** point up, “sometimes there is a choice; other times there isn’t.”

- Either/or
- Other than
- Neither/nor
- Otherwise

**Cause and effect words:** can tell the reasons why things happen as they do.

- Accordingly
- Since
- Then
- Because
- So
- Thus
- Consequently
- Hence
- Therefore
- For this reason
- As a result of
- Why

**Concession Words:** say, “OK, we agree on this much.”

- Accepting the data
- Granted that
- Of course

**Conclusion Words:** tell you to expect the lecturer or writer’s last, and possibly most important, point within a paragraph or larger unit of thought.

- Therefore
- As a result
- To sum up
- Finally
- In conclusion
- For these reasons
- Thus
- Consequently
- Hence
- In summary
- Last of all
- In brief

**Contrast or Change of Direction Words:** prepare you for the change in direction of a presenter’s thought. They tell you that a previous statement will probably be reversed or modified.
Emphasis Words: Among the most valuable signals for you to know are emphasis words, through which the speaker tells you directly that a particular idea or detail is especially important. Think of such words as red flags being used to make you pay attention to an idea.

Important to note
Most of all
Should be noted
The most substantial issue
A key feature
A primary concern
Above all
Indeed
Above all
Most noteworthy
Remember that
A central issue
The chief outcome
More important
A vital part

Equivalent words: they say, “it does what I just said, but it does this too.”

As well as
Equally important
At the same time
Similarly
Likewise

Illustration words: tell you that an example will be given to make an idea clear.

For example
Specifically
For instance
To illustrate
Once
Such as
as
like

Order of chronological words: tell the order that events happen or what steps occur. They may also be used to denote relative importance.

First
Finally
Afterwards
Subsequently
Ultimately
Next
Then
Now
Later
Before
Last
Previously

Qualifying words: say, “here is what to expect. These are the conditions we are working under.”

If
Providing
Although
Unless
Whenever

Repetition words: they say, “I said it before, but I’m going to repeat it in case you missed it.”

Again
To repeat
In other words
That is

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