

Understanding academic talks: Structure, Discourse markers & Signposting

○ **Warm up**

- What kind of academic talk have you experienced in the last semester? Think of three such examples.
- Were these talks in your native language or in your second/third language?
- What differences can you point out between **lectures** and **other forms of academic talk** such as presentations or talks on a particular topic (e.g., a TED Talk)?
- Did you experience any difficulties in understanding these talks?

Task 1

Types of Academic talk

Fill in the blanks below using the types of talks academics give below:

Workshop, Tutorial, Lecture, Seminar, Presentation

- A _____ involves a large formal class in which subject materials are taught to students enrolled in a given subject/course.
- A _____ is a smaller class in which materials from lectures and readings can be discussed in more detail and are usually less formal.
- A _____ is the act of showing a product or idea, or piece of work through textual and graphical slides that accompany the talk of a speaker to an audience at a meeting.
- A _____ is a combination of a lecture and a tutorial, either at an academic setting or a commercial organization, that brings together small groups of people for recurring meetings, focusing each time on a particular subject in which everyone is requested to participate.
- A _____ usually involves academic staff presenting themes or concepts related to the course. They are usually more hands-on learning that allow discussion and debate regarding the given topic.

○ **Discourse Markers and Signposting**

Signposting is important in all communication as it lets the reader/listener know where you are in terms of the development of your text. For example, how does what I'm saying now relate to what I said before?

We use signposting or discourse markers for different reasons. For example:

Purpose	Discourse marker
we might want to clarify what we have just said by using	'By this, I mean ...'
to show the focus of the lecture	'we're talking about', 'our topic today is'
indicating the importance of topics and information	'I think it is important to know', 'one thing to bear in mind is that', 'remember', 'my point is', 'what is important about ... is', 'but we must never forget'; 'and please do learn how'
organizing discourse	'I'm gonna go ahead and put the verb for the quiz on the board', 'the second point is', 'next, we are going to talk about'
summarizing	'in conclusion', 'to sum up'
contextualization markers	'there are four stages of', 'let's go back a minute', 'to sum up so far', 'let me repeat it', 'for example', 'goes along with that', 'that's called', 'first', 'and', 'or', 'well', and 'now'.
dividing the content of lecture into point and non-point units	'my second point there'; 'that was a bit of an aside'
explaining topics which need to be covered in detail	we'll talk about it in detail later'; 'now we'll look at that in a bit more detail'
saying what might be examined in assessment	'be a question about this in one of your exams'; 'but you might want to remember it for the exam'

Task 2

Look at the following uses of signposts and match them to the phrases:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| A clarify | 1. So, now we've looked at X |
| B finish a point | 2. In particular, we'll see ... |
| C order information | 3. By this, I mean ... |
| D introduce contrast | 4. We'll start with X, then look at Y, then ... |
| E show importance | 5. Moving on to ... |
| F start a new point | 6. On the other hand, though ... |
| G summarise | 7. We can see this by looking at ... |
| H give examples | 8. So, to sum up .. |
| | 9. Now, let's turn to look at X |
| | 10. At the heart of this problem is ... |
| | 11. Let's recap some of the key points. |
| | 12. That's all for X. |

Self-Study : Task 4

- **Analyze the following lecture transcript from the above [TED Talk](#) for the presence of signposting. If no signposting is present where you might expect it, make your own suggestions based on the typical uses of A-H:**

A clarify

B finish a point

C order information

D introduce contrast

E show importance

F start a new point

G summarize

H give examples

Transcript Daphne Koller, TED Talks

Daphne Koller is enticing top universities to put their most intriguing courses online for free — not just as a service, but as a way to research how people learn. With Coursera (cofounded by Andrew Ng), each keystroke, quiz, peer-to-peer discussion and self-graded assignment builds an unprecedented pool of data on how knowledge is processed.

“Like many of you, I am one of the lucky people. I was born into a family where

education was pervasive. I am a third generation PhD, a daughter of two academics. In my childhood I was playing in my father’s university lab. So I take it for granted that I attended some of the best universities, which in turn opened the door to a world of opportunity.

Unfortunately, most of the people are not so lucky. In parts of the world, for example South Africa, education is just not readily accessible. In South Africa, the education system was constructed in the days of Apartheid, for the white minority, and as a consequence, today there are not enough spots for those people who want and deserve a high quality education.

That scarcity led to a crisis in January this year at the university of Johannesburg. There were a handful of positions left open from the central admissions process and in the night before they were supposed to open that for registration, thousands of people lined up at the gates, in a line a mile long, hoping to be first in line to get one of those positions. When the gates opened, there was a stampede and twenty people were injured and one woman died. She was a mother who gave her life trying to get her son the chance at a better life. But even in parts of

the world, like in the United States, where education is available, it might not be within reach. There's been much discussed about the rising costs of health care. What might not be quite as obvious to people is that during that same period this cost of higher education tuition has been increasing by almost twice the rate for a total of 559% since 1985. This makes education unaffordable for many people. Finally, even for those who do manage to get into higher education, the doors of opportunity might not open."

Task 5 (Track 12)

- A** clarify
- B** finish a point
- C** order information
- D** introduce contrast
- E** show importance
- F** start a new point
- G** summarize
- H** give examples

Which of the lectures uses A – H? Can you recognize some signposts in the three extracts that follow? Write the use on the left and the phrase on the right. You will hear it twice.

Lecturer 1

-
-

Lecturer 2

-
-
-

Lecturer 3

-
-

Task 7 (track 14)

- **Complete the phrases by writing in the missing word(s).**

1. At..... point, we'll look at the effects of deforestation.
- 2....., we've covered the effects of deforestation

3. We've with the effects of deforestation
4. I'd like to the effects of deforestation
5. We'll talk about the effects of deforestation in a
6. Now, the effects of deforestation.
- 7..... talked a bit about the effects of deforestation
8. We're going to come..... to the effects of deforestation
9. So, the effects of deforestation
10. At some point, we'll the effects of deforestation.

Task 6 (track 14)

Listen to 10 phrases from a lecture on deforestation. Put them into three categories:

a) has been talked about **b)** will be talked about next **c)** will be talked about later

Write the appropriate letter next to each number.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Vocabulary _ Week 1

Links:

[AWL Sublist 1 Definitions](#)

[AWL Sublist 1 Word Families](#)

[AWL Sublist 1 Exercises](#)

Sublist One – this list of words contains the most frequent words in the Academic corpus

analysis	established	occur
approach	estimate	percent
area	evidence	period
assessment	export	policy
assume	factors	principle
authority	financial	procedure
available	formula	process
benefit	function	required
concept	identified	research
consistent	income	response
constitutional	indicate	role
context	individual	section
contract	interpretation	sector
create	involved	significant
data	issues	similar
definition	labour	source
derived	legal	specific
distribution	legislation	structure
economic	major	theory
environment	method	variable