[This Handout Supports Goals 5 and 7]

**Linking Words: The Limits of Words that Make Lists**

Strong paragraphs are built by making careful links between neighboring sentences. When two sentences are well linked, the first few words of the second sentence usually make an explicit connection to the first sentence. Without that explicit connection, the neighboring sentences may drift apart and the paragraph may start to wander or repeat.

Linking words and phrases work in different ways. Some linking words build paragraphs that are essentially lists, organized more or less like a grocery list. As in a grocery list, these paragraphs don’t connect the sentences, and so list-based paragraphs don’t usually build idea upon idea. Instead, they say, “Here’s another thing I found.”

Words that list: also, another, too, in addition

In this example, the writer connects two authors, but with the linking word, “also,” the analysis stalls as the listing begins.

*Charlip put in a lot of effort to be accepted into a good college and was able to succeed in her work there. Mellix was also able to overcome the unfairness she perceived between social classes by believing the system-justifying belief that working hard pays off. She found that the barrier for her between her class and the upper class was language.*

A writer can sometimes get a paragraph back on track by trying different linking words. Notice what happens when the writer uses “while” to connect those sentences.

*Charlip put in a lot of effort to be accepted into a good college and was able to succeed in her work there. While Mellix also believed in success and worked hard to overcome the unfairness she perceived between social classes, she found that the crucial barrier for her between her class and the upper class was actually language.*

By using “while” to make the link, the writer starts to highlight both similarities and differences between the two authors. Changing the linking word has deepened the opportunity for careful observation and analysis.

“Also” is a particularly pesky connector, since it is so accessible. The temptation is great to reach for the easiest word to tie two sentences or ideas together. Sometimes, in order to limit the use of such easy and inefficient connectors, the writer might opt to look for more original ways to connect ideas. In the following example, the “also” connecting Mellix to the conversation is unnecessary, since the two sentences are already connected by the term “ideal identity.” By removing “also,” we remove the unnecessary connector and draw the reader’s attention to the key idea in the paragraph—students’ inability to develop their ideal identities if certain tools are denied them.

*Fortunately, Charlip was able to secure a spot in the preparatory classes at an early age. However, many other bright students were left behind because the teachers did not allow them to demonstrate their ability and develop their ideal identities. Mellix was also unable to explore her ideal identity at school. She realized, as time went on, that speaking Standard English was*
her way to get into college and get a good job; however, her teachers did not really help the students develop in the language.

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Almost as inefficient a connector as “also” is the phrase “in addition.” The reasons are essentially the same; “in addition” is another way of listing points instead of developing ideas. A much better strategy would be using words that attempt to define or shape the relationship between the ideas. This strategy is occasionally referred to as subordination, and it is a nice, relatively easy way to add a degree of complexity to your writing. The use of “while” instead of “also” in the first passage is an example of subordination. Here is another example:

**In addition** to explaining the psychological need for many people to adopt system justifying beliefs, O’Brien and Major found that these beliefs are related to a higher psychological well being.

O’Brien and Major found that many people adopt system justifying beliefs because of a need for psychological well being.

The “because” in this sentence does not just link the two ideas. It underscores the fact that the two ideas are dependent on each other: the “need for psychological well being” drives people to “adopt system justifying beliefs.” Ergo, the relationship between the two elements is far more complex than a simple “in addition.” By employing a linking word that highlights that relationship—that shows subordination—the link is much stronger.