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## Structuring Thought in Young Writers: Analyzing Discourse Markers in Elementary Essays

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### Abstract

*This study examined the use of Discourse Markers (DMs) in the formal writing of elementary learners, a relatively underexplored area in English language education. Employing a qualitative content analysis, the research analyzed 10 essays selected from 50 Grade 5 and 6 learners. Drawing on Fraser's Semantic Perspective Framework and Taboada and Mann's Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST), the study explored the frequency, types, and functions of DMs in learners' compositions. Findings revealed a dominant use of Elaborative Discourse Markers (EDMs), with "and" being significantly overused. This reflects a reliance on basic additive constructions, indicative of early cognitive and linguistic development. Other DM categories were rarely employed, suggesting limited ability to construct more complex rhetorical relationships. The results highlight the developmental nature of DM use and advocate for explicit targeted instruction in a wider range of markers to foster coherence and discourse competence in young learners' academic writing.*

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## Introduction

The Elementary English curriculum in the Philippines is designed to enhance learners' communicative competence and multiliteracies in understanding the language and culture (DepEd, 2016). It equips learners with the necessary skills needed for effective oral and written communication, preparing them for global participation and future success. Along this, though complex skill, the curriculum introduces formal writing to learners as early as 3<sup>rd</sup> grade because it plays a vital role in their critical thinking development requiring them to organize and structure ideas logically. In fact, the earlier writing skills are developed, the stronger they become over time, ultimately helping learners achieve higher levels of academic success (Marco Learning, 2025). There have been numerous studies highlighting the significance of writing skills in improving learners' academic performance, communication abilities, and fulfilling various essential needs in life (Bora, 2023; Nassir, 2016; and Shojaee, 2016). They argued that improving writing skills boosts learning retention and cognitive abilities, as organizing ideas helps reinforce knowledge, thereby, enhancing students' academic performance. Moreover, Bokkassam and Mishra (2024) emphasized the importance of formal writing to enhance learners' grammar, writing content, and structural skills and further suggested that formal writing should be introduced as a subject itself in the curriculum.

Meanwhile, developing writing has long been a challenge for elementary English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and learners, as it goes beyond simply mastering grammar and syntax (Fareed, et al., 2016). To produce a clear and understandable writing output demands not only following language rules but also the ability to structure information in a meaningful way using suitable DMs to link ideas and sentences effectively. This means that the writer has to bring sentences together and put structured units as cohesive devices to create logical progression of ideas. Even when discussing complex topics, the structured approach minimizes ambiguity and keeps the material accessible to readers, even to those non-experts in the subject. According to Tannen, et al. as cited by Al-khazaraji (2019), DMs', which have been widely studied since are words or phrases like "*and*", "*but*", "*because*" and "*as well*" that link one section of a discourse to its succeeding part. Their purpose is for readers to comprehend text easily without interruption.



Additionally, their use contributes to both clarity and cohesion in written organization by directing the logical flow of communication, and signaling shifts between ideas or arguments. Karaata et al., as cited by Alkhazraji (2019), argued that issues in formal writing often stem from the improper or insufficient use of DMs. To address and achieve coherence in writing, it is essential to use appropriately connected phrases and sentences, which can only be facilitated through the careful application of DMs (Manan, et al., 2017).

Studies of DMs continue to be a dynamic area of research due to its significance in linguistic fields such as in discourse analysis. Over the years, studies about DMs have expanded to include written discourse in trying to understand the communicative, illustrative and context-dependent nature of human language. In formal writing, DMs typically take the form of cohesive devices like conjunctions and grammatical structures (Biber et al., 1999), supporting clarity, precision, and logical structure. They help indicate relationships from among the ideas presented such as cause-effect, addition, contrast and conclusion. Furthermore, DMs contribute to the impersonal tone required in formal writing by maintaining professionalism ensuring that ideas are clearly presented without emotional bias (Hyland, 2005). This minimizes confusion and allows readers to accurately interpret the intended meaning (Gillaerts & Vandelanotte, 2013). Swan as cited by Alkhazraji (2019) asserted that utilization of DMs empowers writers to construct more comprehensible context to readers thus restraining their explanation of text. Therefore, the appropriate application of DMs can positively impact the overall texture of a text discourse. Various researches have looked into its role in formal writing and stressed DMs importance in producing high quality written output. Al-Khazaraji (2019) noted a strong correlation between DM use and writing quality, while Martinez (2004) found a statistical correlation between composition scores and the number of DMs used. This implies that the frequency of appropriate used of DMs in discourse texts is an indicator of the quality of the essay as well as the learners' writing skill. Similarly, Shariq (2024) and Putri et al. (2025) argued that inadequate, repetitive and or inability to use DMs correctly can negatively affect the performance in writing or perhaps result to a poor output. Thus, Alsaawi (2022), Pasaribu (2017) and Manan (2017), recommended for teachers to include DMs in their teaching practice and provide more opportunities for learners to learn and use DMs to improve



their writing performance. Huneety, et al. (2023) further suggested for teachers to expose their learners in the different DMs to vary their DMs use rather than being confined with few ranges. Collectively, these clearly suggest that as writing tasks become more complex, the need to include these markers grows, as they are essential for learners to express their ideas clearly and cohesively at a deeper level.

However, despite its importance, the current approach in elementary ESL English classes in the Philippines is still leaning towards traditional (Williams as cited by Dulger, 2007). Mastery of linguistic competence is still central in writing instruction. Consequently, teachers, who believe in the said approach, give more emphasis on word or sentence-level skills, often neglecting the focus on textual coherence (Kamali & Noori, 2015). Their writing feedback revolves on punctuation, spelling and grammar usage leaving learners a notion that DMs are less important in writing. Moreover, the lack of emphasis on DM instruction at the elementary level may stem from the predominant focus in English classes on word and sentence-level accuracy, rather than on achieving overall textual coherence (Kamali & Noori, 2015). Hence, many elementary learners, specifically fifth and sixth graders, struggle to produce cohesive texts, as they are not adequately exposed in the appropriate use of DMs. Fifth and sixth grades mark the final stages of elementary education, where learners are expected to demonstrate writing proficiency based on DepEd competencies. However, informal classroom assessments reveal that many learners still struggle in organizing their thoughts, indicating a gap between expected competencies and actual performance. Some research findings consistently show that many fifth and sixth grade learners struggle with writing proficiency.

Surahman et al. (2021) found out that content organization is the third most common difficulty faced by them. Similarly, De Los Reyes and Halili (2019) emphasized that learners at this stage often produce written outputs lacking coherence and clear structure, suggesting a need for targeted interventions. This tendency is likely influenced by teachers' dependence on conventional methods of assessing writing. Shariq (2025) and Huneety, et al. (2023) found out that though learners have employed a variety of DMs, the accuracy was found to be low. Misused and overused of markers were found to be the



culprit why their compositions turned out to be weak instead of impactful. In addition, Alahmed and Kirmizi (2020) and Huneety et al. found that ESL students struggle with using correct sentence structures in their writing and often insert DMs in segments where they are not needed. This results to over usage, which greatly affects the quality of writing. They concluded that the said problem arise because of the students' belief that sentences containing a high number of DMs are of higher quality and more effective.

Though the aforementioned studies give enlightenment on the use of DMs, they leave a significant gap in our understanding of how elementary learners use DMs in their writing, particularly in the Philippine setting as most existing studies have focused on high school and college students. This paper argues that writing habits and linguistic competence acquired in elementary years play a crucial role in shaping learners' future writing development. Without early exposure to coherent text structuring, students are likely to carry these weaknesses into their later academic stages. Thus, this paper tries to fill in that gap aiming to explore and describe how elementary learners use DMs in their informative essays, with the goal of assessing their competence in achieving coherence in writing. By analyzing their written outputs, this study hopes to provide valuable insights into their developmental writing stages. Furthermore, it seeks to offer practical recommendations for language teachers, helping them better understand the specific needs of elementary learners. These insights can help language teachers adapt their pedagogical strategies to enhance the effectiveness of DM instruction, ultimately contributing to the foundation of stronger writing skills in developing learners' ability to produce coherent and well-structured texts.

Specifically, this sought to answer the following questions:

1. What specific DMs do elementary learners frequently use?
2. What type of DMs constitutes most of the essays of elementary learners?
3. How are DMs used in elementary essays?



## Theoretical Considerations

This research is rooted on two models. The first is the Semantic Perspective framework for DMs provided by Bruce Fraser (1990) in his study, “An approach to discourse markers”. He categorized DMs as a subset of pragmatic markers (PMs), providing a classification of English DMs. In this framework, Fraser assumed that for every language there is a functional class of lexical expressions called PMs. These expressions in discourse segment, though not part of the propositional content of the message being conveyed, signal aspects of the message the speaker or the writer wishes to convey.

According to this framework, DMs function is to signal a relation between the discourse segment, which hosts them, and the prior discourse segment each representing an Illocutionary Act – performance of an action through speaking. Moreover, DMs relatively independent of syntax and do not alter the truth-conditional meaning of a sentence. Despite this, DMs help clarify, organize, and emphasize various parts of a message, while signaling relationships between ideas or segments within speech (Fraser as cited by Al-khazraji, 2019). For an expression to become a DM, it must be in between two discourse segments (**S1, S2**) such that **S1-DM+S2** sequence is followed. It must also suffice three conditions; (1) It should be a lexical expression, (2) A DM must occur as part of the second discourse segment where **S1-DM+S2** and (3) A DM signals a specific semantic relationship which holds between the interpretation of the two Illocutionary Act segments (**S1, S2**) and does not contribute to the semantic meaning of the segment. Given the aforementioned conditions, the DMs of English are classified into four functional classes or types:

a. *Elaborative Markers* (EDMs). Help clarify, expand, provide additional information and signal an elaboration in S2 from the previously mentioned

S1. (*and, above all, after all, also, alternatively, analogously, besides, by the same token, correspondingly, equally, for example, for instance, further(more), in addition, in other words, in particular, likewise, more accurately, more importantly,*



*more precisely, more to the point, moreover, on that basis, on top of it all, or, otherwise, rather, similarly,...)*

b. *Contrastive Markers (CDMs)*. Signal direct or indirect opposing views between S1 and S2 highlighting difference or contrast of ideas between the previous and present statements. (*but, alternatively, although, contrariwise, contrary to expectations, conversely, despite (this/that), even so, however, in spite of (this/that), in comparison (with this/that), in contrast (to this/that), instead (of this/that), nevertheless, nonetheless, (this/that point), notwithstanding, on the other hand, on the contrary, rather (than this/that), regardless (of this/that), still, though, whereas, yet...*)

c. *Inferential Markers (IDMs)*. Signal that S1 provides a basis for inferring

S2 such that leading audience to draw logical conclusion, implication or reasoning based on the S1 presented. (*so, all things considered, as a conclusion, as a consequence (of this/that), as a result (of this/that), because (of this/that), consequently, for this/ that reason, hence, it follows that, accordingly, in this/that/any case, on this/that condition, on these/those grounds, then, therefore, thus*)

d. *Temporal Markers (TDMs)*. Indicate the timing or sequence of events in a text, which helps structure the flow of time making the progression of events in the text easier to follow.

*(before, after, then, initially, subsequently, meanwhile, at the same time, soon, later, eventually, earlier, previously, during, once, in the meantime, finally, at last, in the past, from now on, up until then...)*

The second model this research has adapted is the Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST), which was originally developed by Mann and Thompson in 1988 and later on was adapted by Taboada and Mann (2006). Similar to Fraser's definition, Taboada and Mann describe DMs as words or phrases that helps in organizing, connecting, and structuring communication, whether in written or spoken form, but do not convey significant content on their own. Their model is based on the idea that understanding DMs requires a structured approach to analyzing their communicative function and their





contribution to the overall structure of written discourse. In this model, Taboada and Mann focus on the analysis of DMs within the text and speech following the key elements of the model namely:

- a. *Rhetorical relations*. highlights how DMs relate segments of discourse, thereby contributing to the textual coherence of the message.
- b. *Functional categorization*. Explores the different roles DMs play in structuring written discourse;
- c. *Coherence and structure*. Analyze how DMs relate discourse units together to better understand how different segments fit together logically.
- d. *Typology of DMs*. Analyze DMs roles in discourse whether at the sentence level or to the totality of the paragraph;
- e. *Textual and pragmatic dimensions*. Analyze and understand the meaning about the writer's intention, which impact how the message is interpreted.

Moreover, in their model, each identified DM is analyzed for its rhetorical relation and categorized its usage into functional coding labels:

- a. *Misused*. Not match the rhetorical relation intended by the surrounding text;
- b. *Overused*. Excessive repetition of the same DM even when not rhetorically required;
- c. *Advanced use*. Instances where learners used DMs in rhetorically complex, varied or stylistically effective ways. These include the use of contrastive or inferential markers to guide reader interpretation.

Through this systematic categorization, we can be able to examine how effective learners are in the use of DMs in their essays. We can also further understand the complex relationships between form, function and the meaning the writer wishes to convey in the written discourse.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with content analysis research design to explore and describe the use and functions of DMs in formal writing of elementary learners. The participants consisted of 50 fifth and sixth grade learners from Dipolog Pilot Demonstration School during the



school year 2024–2025. Alongside Filipino, English has been considered as the official language of communication in schools and is predominantly used as the medium of instruction in subjects such as English, Science, and Math, beginning in the early years of education as provided by the Philippine Constitution. By the time of the study, participants are already familiar with formal writing and essay composition. Since third grade, they had been taught various types of informational texts, as well as how to write different types of essays, including descriptive, argumentative, cause-and-effect, expository, news, feature, and editorial.

Before the data gathering commenced, a letter was sent to the Principal seeking for approval. Afterwards, an informed consent was secured from the parents' of the learners explaining the nature of the study. Then, learners were fully informed about the purpose of the research and their voluntary participation. Lastly, no names were written on the paper to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the essay.

After the preliminaries, the respondents were asked to write an informative essay consisting of 100 – 500 words on the “Advantages and Disadvantages of Technology”. They were given a day for the composition, which was enough time for them to write considering their grade level. The choice of an informative essay genre was intentional, as it is the most commonly assigned type of essay at the elementary level. It is therefore expected that the participants are familiar with how to craft such one. Additionally, the topic is highly relevant to the learners, who are deeply engaged with technology in their daily lives. Writing about this topic allows them to evaluate both its benefits and drawbacks, encouraging responsible use and promoting the ability to make well-informed judgments. After the writing period, all essays were collected for analysis. Before final acceptance, a brief validation process was conducted wherein participants were asked questions about their essays to confirm authorship, ensuring the reliability and validity of the data. Of the 50 submitted essays, 20 were initially selected based on word count and relevance to the topic. From this pool, 10 essays were randomly chosen for in-depth analysis.

During data analysis, the researcher read each essay multiple times, identifying and categorizing all DMs used. The coding procedure began



with multiple thorough readings of the selected essays to build familiarity with the data. To address Question 1, all DMs were identified and extracted from the texts. Each DM was coded by its exact lexical form, following Fraser's (1990) framework. Frequencies were tallied, and the percentage of each DM was computed based on the total number of identified DMs. For Question 2, each DM identified was further categorized into one of Fraser's (1990) four functional types: elaborative, contrastive, inferential, and temporal. The percentage for each type was then calculated relative to the total DM count. To answer Question 3, the analysis focused on how DMs were used to construct coherence, guided by Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) adapted from Taboada and Mann's (2006) model. Each DM was analyzed in context to determine its rhetorical function and was coded into functional categories:

- a. *Misused*. When the DM did not align with the intended rhetorical relation;
- b. *Overused*. When a DM was excessively repeated unnecessarily; and
- c. *Advanced use*. When the DM was used in a rhetorically complex or stylistically effective manner.

## Results and Discussion

### *The DMs elementary learners frequently use*

The analysis of DMs identified a total of 250 occurrences. The most frequently used DM was "and", accounting for 88 (35.2%) instances of the total. Other commonly used markers include "also" with 30 (12%) instances, "or" and "but" with 16 (6.4%) each, and "because" with 13 (5.2%) occurrences. Markers such as "as" (4%), "however" and "even if" (both 2.4%), and "so" (2.4%) also appeared moderately. Less frequently occurring DMs included "especially" (1.6%), "still" (1.6%), "now" (1.6%), and "always" (1.6%). There are also a number of markers occurred only once or twice including, "for example", "moreover", "such as", "furthermore", "on the other hand", "although", "though", "despite", "instead of", "in conclusion", "as a result", "at some point", "before", and "second", each comprising between 0.4% to 0.8% of the total. These numbers indicate a strong preference for additive and elaborative DMs, implying that the essays primarily employ basic cohesive strategies.



Among the six most commonly used DMs, four are EDMs (*and, also, or, as*) while CDMs (*but*) and IDMs (*because*) got one each. It is worth noting that none from the TDMs are included in the six most commonly used. The frequent use of EDMs suggests that elementary learners tend to favor elaborative and explanatory DMs, which are simpler and more frequently encountered in everyday language, over those that require more advanced cognitive and structural skills, such as temporal markers. This implies that young learners are actively building upon their thoughts and providing more details in their writing to ensure clarity and depth in their explanations, helping to present their ideas more coherently.

Furthermore, the EDM “*and*” is the most frequently used DMs by the elementary learners appearing 88 times. This high frequency suggests a strong reliance on “*and*” to build up ideas by adding explanations or examples to that support their arguments on the topic. The prevalence of “*and*” in their output is a common characteristic of early-stage writing, often characterized by a reliance on simple DMs to connect ideas and maintain sentence coherence (Gillespie, 2017). McCutchen (2015) and Scarcella (2015) emphasized that elementary learners' writing frequently shows an overuse of “*and*” due to their developing cognitive and linguistic strategies. It allows them to express ideas clearly in a straightforward sentence structure, making “*and*” a simple and flexible device in their writing. Reid (2015) and Gillespie (2017) noted that young writers often choose default DMs like “*and*” as they learn to link or transition between ideas. Without explicit instruction in DM use, learners struggle to incorporate a wider range of connectors, resulting in repetitive writing. Although they aim for coherence, their overreliance on basic DMs limits their ability to express more complex relationships such as cause-effect or contrast. This suggests that at this stage, learners lack the skills and vocabulary needed to use varied DMs effectively.

### ***Types of DMs that constitutes most of the essays of elementary learners***

*Table 1 Frequency of DMs classes*



<b>DMs category</b>	<b>Frequency (<i>f</i>)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Elaborative (EDMs)</b>	156	62.4
<b>Contrastive (CDMs)</b>	44	17.6
<b>Inferential (IDMs)</b>	29	11.6
<b>Temporal (TDMs)</b>	21	8.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

The total frequency of DMs for each type based on Fraser’s frameworks, highlighting the distribution and usage patterns of DMs across the four categories are shown above. It can be observed that all four categories of DMs were employed in the essays, though usage may vary in frequency, suggesting that learners have already developed awareness on how to structure their writing. Moreover, the presence of the four DM types indicates that learners are aware of the fundamental discourse functions, like introducing further details and establishing contrast. Despite their less exposure to DMs, learners tried to use a variety of DMs to show relationships between or among the ideas and relate them coherently for their compositions to be understandable. This further suggests that learners are beginning to refine their writing coherently, though inconsistent, even at the elementary school level, exhibiting a notable development in both their writing skills and the use of second language for communication.

Additionally, EDMs constitute the largest portion of DMs in their essays, wherein “and”, “also” and “or” are the most used DMs in this category. This suggests that the content of elementary essays focused on providing additional details to help simplify complex ideas. As explained by Nesi and Meara (2015), the reliance of EDMs in elementary learners’ writing is but normal as they are in the process of developing their writing skills, particularly during transitioning from basic-sentence level to a more complex paragraph-level forms. This strategy helps them break general points into specific and understandable ones ensuring that their writing follows logical progression and does not deviate on the main theme



(Bachman, 1990). Moreover, the overwhelming occurrences of EDMs can also be attributed to the nature of informative essay learners wrote, which aimed to present clear, organized and factual information in a formal tone. To achieve this, EDMs are essential for linking related ideas effectively.

Moreover, CDMs appear at a moderate frequency. These markers highlight contrasts between preceding and succeeding statements. The moderate frequency of CDMs indicates that the essays involved some degree of debate or comparison, particularly in addressing the advantages and disadvantages of technology. This indicates that elementary learners recognized the importance of presenting counterarguments in their writing to present more balance arguments.

Placing last in terms of frequency are the IDMs and TDMs . IDMs are used to indicate cause-effect relationship between statements and or conclusions drawn from prior information while TDMs structure information chronologically. The relatively low frequencies of these DMs suggest that young learners cognitive abilities are not yet leaning towards logical deductions, more complex argumentations and structuring ideas in a well-sequenced time manner because these abilities are yet to develop through experience as they mature academically. Piaget's stages of cognitive development (1964) outlined that in concrete operational stage, between the ages of 6 and 12, learners comprehend through tangible situations therefore, drawing conclusions and reasoning abilities, which are abstract in nature, are the least priorities of the respondents. Novice-writing focuses more on the basic writing skills thus, the more complex organization of ideas through the use of IDMs and TDMs, may not yet be their primary focus and perhaps may come at a later stage in their writing development.

Overall, the essays of the elementary learners are largely descriptive and explanatory in nature, emphasizing elaboration through the use of EDMs. This finding aligns with their concrete

operational developmental stage, where they prioritize on providing direct and clear information rather than abstract reasoning. The frequent use of EDMs in elementary learners' essays corroborates the findings of Aysu



(2017), where EDMs dominated in elementary learners' writing. Similarly, studies on older students by Putri & Jayantini (2025), Pasaribu (2018), Ab Manan & Raslee (2017) also observed heavy reliance on EDMs. Therefore, given this trend, it is even more expected that young learners, who are still in the foundational stages of acquiring and applying the English language, would exhibit a similar pattern.

### Usage of DMs in elementary learners' essays

Through repeated readings of the essays, this section presents a thorough discussion on how elementary learners use DMs in their essays following Taboada and Mann's Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST). The discussion of the findings is classified into Discourse Markers' misused, Discourse Markers' overused and Discourse Markers' advanced use.

#### Discourse Markers' Misused

##### Excerpt 1

*"I mentioned entertainment because technology has lots of games such as blockblast, granny and lots more. **But** beware, make sure to watch your screen time, it can give you bad eyesight or sore eyes."*

In excerpt 1, the DM "but" introduces a contrasting idea but does not logically relate from the previous statement. The first sentence talks about entertainment, while the second sentence shifts to a caution about phone usage that are not related at all. The shifting feels abrupt, as the relationship of ideas was not fully developed resulting to disjointed statements. The DM "but" implies contrast between the two sentences but the prior sentence does not clearly establish a point to contrast with. Thus, creating confusion among readers, as they could not relate with what exactly is being contrasted. Restructuring the sentences and perhaps using "however" instead of "but" can provide a smoother transition, more formal tone and enhance the clarity and cohesion of the ideas.

##### Excerpt 2



*At some point of our lives we used technology. **And** it came with some problems along whether big or small, **however** technology might've had a big impact on you if it helped you."*

When an elementary learner begins a sentence with "and", there is an implicit suggestion that the sentence should be connected to a previous idea. In this excerpt, the use of "and" is problematic not only because it started the sentence but also because it fails to clarify on how it links to the previous statement. The first segment discusses how people use technology, while the second highlights the problems it causes. These are two opposing viewpoints on the topic, making the usage of the DM "and" inappropriate. Moreover, the sentence construction is already complex, and the use of "and" further complicates the relationship between the use of technology and the problems it has brought. The use of "and" here feels like a disconnected fragment because the first sentence is already full thought; starting with "and" disrupts the cohesion. A more effective revision would involve either merging the two sentences for smoother flow or replacing "and" with a more appropriate DM to clarify the intended relationship.

Considering the two excerpts, it was found out from most of the essays that elementary learners tend to start their sentences with a DM such as "and" and "but". While it is not grammatically incorrect to start a sentence with those words, the idea can feel fragmented in a formal discourse, as there is no clear prior context. In RST, the function of "and" is to signal elaboration between two related ideas while "but" is to present contrast between two statements thereby contributing to textual coherence. One of the three conditions in using DMs is that it must occur as part of the second discourse segment and since DMs "and" and "but" are used at the beginning of an independent segment that has no relationship with the prior segment, therefore, they are considered misused DMs. This implies that elementary learners, at some point, have hard time decoding the relationship between two succeeding ideas resulting to misuse of DMs and incoherent discourse.





### Excerpt 3

*“Advantage about technology is it can help us do hard things. Technology can also be useful in our daily basis. **While on the other hand**, disadvantages about technology is that it can be annoying sometimes **because** there are many scammers that try to scam you for your money in a bank account. **And** also hackers can really be annoying because they will get all your info’s like passwords, videos, photos, files, bank account and many more.”*

In this extract, the first segment shows the usefulness of technology and then further reinforces with another segment presenting another positive aspect of the topic supporting the first statement. The third segment, being the central theme, introduces contrast from the prior two segments through the signal *“while on the other hand”*. The author wanted to show a rhetorical relation among the first, second and third segments. Although, the use of *“while on the other hand”* is technically correct as a DM, which serves to contrast the positive and negative areas of technology, using both *“while”* and *“on the other hand”* altogether weakens the clarity and cohesion of the ideas. *“While on the other hand”* is not generally used together because it can be redundant, as both phrases show contrast. Instead, the author should choose either *“while”* or *“on the other hand”*, depending on the context, to improve the texture of the paragraph. Similarly, the *“and”* in the last segment is misused. In the context, it serves as an additive marker to the disadvantages of technology brought about by scammers and hackers, thus both clauses should be connected together with the use of the marker *“and”* instead of using it to start the sentence.

### Discourse Markers’ Overused

#### Excerpt 4

*“**Because** of technology, students might not even try to answer their homework anymore **because** Artificial Intelligence does it for them, which can be abuse/abusing your ability to use technology. Children might also get hacked/scammed **because** there are a lot of scammers nowadays.”*

Excerpt 4 was the beginning part of a paragraph in the essay. Not only does it begin with *“because”*, without any preceding statement to relate to, but *“because”* is also used unnecessarily, inappropriately and excessively in the paragraph. In RST, the DM *“because”* introduces a causal relationship



between two segments where one serves as the reason for another. The first use of “*because*” is unnecessary creating an incomplete rhetorical structure as it lacks prior context to complete the cause-effect relation. Furthermore, the second “*because*” is inappropriate because it introduces another cause relation within the same nuclear unit, thus, disjointing the coherence and weakening the progression of ideas. Ideally, each cause-and-effect relationship should introduce a new nuclear unit that builds on the prior one, but in this case, the text is weighed down by the repeated use of “*because*” in one sentence. Likewise, the last “*because*” introduces yet another causal relationship creating excessive repetition. As a result, the overly repetitive use of the DM “*because*” makes the argument cluttered and harder for readers to follow.

#### **Excerpt 5**

*“Because of technology, students might not even try to answer their homework anymore because Artificial Intelligence does it for them, which can be abuse/abusing your ability to use technology. Children might **also** get hacked/scammed because there are a lot of scammers nowadays. They might **also** learn unwanted info and they might see inappropriate stuff which is bad for the health. Cyber bullying is **also** a disadvantage, this can destroy someone’s mental health and make people really depressed.”*

The DM “*also*” in this excerpt serves as an additive role, adding more points to support the topic. It creates an additive relation among the nuclear segments, suggesting that technology posits multiple related risks. It connects one risk to another, contributing to a cumulative structure of the argument about the disadvantages of technology. The first use of “*also*” connects the new issue (being hacked/scammed) to the previously mentioned issue (laziness due to AI), implying concerns about the topic. This further added with more risks in the next segments such as seeing inappropriate content and cyber bullying utilizing the marker “*also*”. Analyzing deeply, though “*also*” was used repetitively in the paragraph, it does not diminishes its effectiveness in connecting all the ideas. While it has been used continuously, it was not necessarily overused. However, to improve the texture, varying the discourse markers could improve the stylistic diversity of the paragraph. EDMs such as “*in addition*”,



*“additionally”, “furthermore” and “too” among others can reduce the reliance on “also”, but still preserve the elaborative and additive nature of the arguments.*

### Excerpt 6

*“Now, let’s talk about the advantages of technology. Some advantages are, helps with your studies. It can help with your studies since you can do some research on it. **And** Entertainment, you can use your technology for entertainment by watching videos on it. **And** last, you can connect with your family online. You can chat with your family online and talk with them even if they are not here. **And** for the conclusion, you should always use your technology cautiously **and** use it for your advantage. Also remember to not use it for bad things. **And** that concludes my text about “Advantages and Disadvantages of Technology.”*

Here, we can see that *“and”* is used repeatedly to add more information about the advantages of technology. The author intended to expand on the central theme using *“and”*, which is its primary function as a DM. However, this results in an overuse of *“and”*, which becomes both excessive and inappropriate. It is excessive because there are other discourse markers that could be used in place of it and inappropriate because *“and”* should generally not be used to begin a sentence. In formal written context, *“and”* is used to continue a list of thought but in this case, started the sentence making it informal. Although, *“and”* is not grammatically incorrect but it is not the best choice for the flow of ideas. Avoiding *“and”* at the beginning of the sentence would improve its flow. Likewise, to enhance the transition between the segments, the author could consider using TDMs such as *“Then”, “Next”, “In conclusion”, and “Finally”* to maintain a clear and coherent structure of thoughts. The excessive manipulation of *“and”* proves that the author has really limited knowledge on the different variance of DMs available to improve cohesion in writing. It also proves that elementary learners are still in the process of building their writing skills, relying on a simple and familiar connector to link ideas.



## Discourse Markers' Advanced Use

### Excerpt 7

*“Technology can help us by machines and robots. AI can **also** help us by answering questions and giving the best solutions or answer to it. Robots are very handy **as well**. It can do dangerous task that are life- threatening to humans. They can do it with accuracy **and** robots won't get fatigue. **However**, there is a downside of technology. AI can make students lazy **and** have no creativity if they use it too much.”*

In excerpt 7, we can see how the learner varies his EDM to present his idea in a coherent manner. The use of “also” creates additive relationship between the first two segments wherein both are presented at an equal importance. To further, elaborate on the topic, the author provided another argument, which was introduced by the EDM “as well”, adding a point on the usefulness of technology, such as machines and robots. Moreover, “and” was also used appropriately in the sentence showing two complimentary characteristics of robots, accuracy and ability, and not as contrastive. Similarly, the use of the CDM, “however”, was used appropriately in the composition. Its function was to oppose the previous arguments about the advantages of technology ensuring that the negative downside of the topic is clearly distinguished from the previous positive points. Here, we can see a nucleus-satellite relationship of ideas at a paragraph level wherein the downside is presented as a differing argument (satellite) to the previous segments on the benefits (nucleus). The author succeeds in creating logical connections of ideas through the use of the different DMs, thus enhancing the overall cohesion of the text.

### Excerpt 8

*“**In conclusion**, while technology has enhanced communication and productivity, it **also** has drawbacks like mental health concerns and privacy and security risks as the main facts. Knowing this, would you still use technology?”*



In this extract, the learner exemplifies the correct use of the IDM “*In conclusion*” to wrap-up the argument. This signals the reader that the next segments are to provide final and overall summary of the topic. What makes the conclusion interesting here is that the closing argument is in juxtapose form contrasting the positive and negative aspects of technology. The use of “*while*” signals the readers a contrast between the good and bad effects of technology, while the use of “*also*” asks the readers to hold on to the contrasting tension and view both points in balance. In RST, the use of varied DMs in this paragraph balances a clear contrastive relation on the different viewpoints about technology that encourages readers to carefully reconsider their stance. As a result, DMs highly contribute to the effectiveness and impact of the text making it more engaging.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Discourse markers contribute indispensably to the textual coherence of a text. Without them, sentences would simply be isolated fragments glued together without purpose. This study demonstrates how the use of DMs helps establish relations between sentences, facilitating logical and meaningful written communication.

The analysis of DMs usage among elementary learners reveals significant insights in their writing abilities. The frequent use of “*and*” in their essays shows that their writings are elaborative in nature. Learners are primarily focused on clarifying, explaining and adding more examples into the theme rather than introducing complex arguments and varied relationships between ideas. Their reliance on simple and familiar DM use is part of their cognitive and linguistic skills development, which is a result of their limited exposure and implicit learning to other kinds of DMs. Additionally, the misapplication of DMs in the texts particularly using them to start a sentence without clear connections to prior sentences demonstrates a deeper developmental issue – their incomplete understanding on how to properly link ideas and organize their writings. This implies that learners are still in the process of transitioning from basic sentence-level construction to more complex paragraph-level writing. Finally, the low frequency of occurrences of other DMs beside EDMs indicates that the higher linguistic skills of the learners like reasoning and abstract thinking have not fully developed yet. Learners’ linguistic ability is still focused on more concrete aspects of



writing, such as providing explanations in a simple and straightforward manner. This phenomenon shows a gap in their understanding of other types of DMs and could possibly hinder their ability to create more nuanced relationships between ideas, particularly for essays that require other complex relations of arguments beside elaboration if not intervened.

Reflecting on these, elementary English teachers, starting from lower grade levels, may gradually introduce diverse DMs other than those most common ones for learners to structure more sophisticated relationships between ideas. This may be done through targeted lessons or integration with other English topics. They may also scaffold writing tasks emphasizing coherence and cohesion in composition like guided practice using specific DMs providing knowledge to learners on the appropriate functions for each DM. Moreover, teachers may also provide immediate and individualized feedback on the writing outputs of the learners focusing on sentence organization and structuring to address gaps, ensuring that these mistakes are not repeated in future work. Then, teachers in Grades 4-6 may gradually start exposing learners to more advanced texts showing varied DMs usage to improve their understanding when it comes to organizing ideas. After exposing, teachers may then provide related activities that promote critical thinking and reasoning abilities like problem-solving, simple debate, explaining their outputs, reporting and show-and-tell. This may be reinforced through writing essays or summaries that require the use of varied DMs, specifically those that show comparison, reasoning and causality to build the skills needed for more complex writing tasks. These recommendations hoped to assist elementary English teachers in refining their pedagogical approach, helping them foster a deeper understanding of the role of discourse markers in guiding learners as they transition from basic sentence-level writing to more structured and nuanced paragraph-level compositions. By adopting these suggestions, teachers may strengthen the foundational writing skills of the learners necessary in expressing their individuality clearly and effectively.

Although, the findings provided significant contribution in English language teaching specifically in elementary learners' writing skill status at present, the scope is limited to one school only. The conclusions of the study are based solely on the appropriate use of varied DMs to achieve textual



coherence in texts. Further research is recommended at a wider scope to increase the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, future researches may also include other linguistics areas in writing such as lexical and syntactic alongside cohesion to broaden the understanding of how these elements contribute to the overall quality of writing in the early years of language acquisition to provide more valuable insights into the ways in which the learners can be supported in improving their writing skills.

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