



A Discourse Analysis of Segment Starters in Adolescent Op-Ed Articles

Joyce Ethel L. Sienes

Department of Education, Philippines

Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>This qualitative research explored the placement of segment starters in learner’s opinion-editorial writing to determine how adolescent writers structure discourse, express argumentation, and attain coherence. Grounded in discourse analysis, the study analyzed an editorial article written by a senior high school learner from a public school. Segment initiators that start paragraphs and control textual flow were examined for rhetorical purpose, frequency, and conformity to genre conventions. Six segment starters from the article were elicited and grouped according to discourse marker typology and cohesion categories. These consisted of topical introducers, additive connectors, temporal and contrastive adverbials, and concessive markers. Each segment starter served a rhetorical function: introducing a topic, contrasting opinions, adding evidence, or conceding counterarguments. These markers contributed to the logical flow of the opinion-editorial and overall coherence. Findings indicated choices were suitable for the op-ed style, reflecting sensitivity to rhetorical strategies and audience expectations. Conclusions support targeted writing instruction.</i></p>	<p>Article History: Received: May 13, 2025 Accepted: July 25, 2025</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: Genre, segment starters, discourse analysis, opinion-editorial discourse marker, coherence</p>

*Corresponding author
E-mail: joyceethel.sienes@deped.gov.ph



Cite as:

Sienes, J. E. L. (2025). A Discourse analysis of segment starters in adolescent Op-Ed articles, *Journal of Education and Language Studies*, 2 (1), 86-111. <https://wmsu.edu.ph/jels/articles.html>



Introduction

Writing is one fundamental skill in academics and real-world communication that enable learners to express their ideas and opinions clearly and logically and to engage themselves in critical thinking. Learners are expected to develop their writing proficiency to effectively convey their thoughts in a clearer and more structured manner. One of the academic texts often patterned by the learners is the expository text, which pertains to informational texts that are non-fictional and give facts, objective opinions, and information about a topic.

This fundamental perspective on writing, which emphasizes its importance, is strongly endorsed by many academics who acknowledge its crucial role in influencing learners' capacity for critical thought and successful interpersonal communication. According to research conducted by Richards and Renandya (2002), writing is not only a means of communication but an interactive process that actively encourages critical thinking skills and intellectual stimulation among learners. Moreover, Hedge (2005) recognizes that writing has a significant contribution towards the development of language as well as intellectual capabilities, particularly when learners are encouraged to express and present complex ideas in well-structured forms. Expository writing, indeed, holds a key role in assisting learners in learning how to organize information in a systematic manner, present logical arguments, and provide factual information in clear and objective terms, according to Dreyer and Nel (2003). These observations serve to substantiate the importance of writing, stressing it as a scholarly tool and a crucial life skill in that learners ought to endeavor to master through continuous practice with proper guidance.

Writing opinion-editorial (op-ed) articles is a valuable exercise in secondary schools. It allows learners to express personal views on current issues, engage in argumentation, and develop persuasive writing skills. More than just conveying opinions, an effective editorial demonstrates coherence, logic, and rhetorical awareness, focusing on



skills that are crucial for academic writing and real-world communication.

Based on the research findings provided by Hyland in 2005, opinion genres like editorials invite writers to make strategic rhetorical choices that are a reflection of having a deep level of audience consciousness and conventions that are transferable across disciplines. Additionally, Coffin, in her book published in 2006, indicates that opinion writing not only invites critical engagement with serious social concerns but also invites learners to constructively build knowledge, develop their own stances, and support their arguments with credible evidence. These learning activities are a significant ingredient in the development of learners' higher-order thinking capabilities as well as the development of learners' language capabilities and their civic voice. Hence, it is through the integration of editorial writing in the learning course that we equip learners with significant tools that equip them to engage in structured thought, convey their persuasive expressions effectively, and actively engage in the rich debate of society.

One important but often failed to check the part of the paragraph writing feature of editorial writing is the use of segment starters. These are the initial words or phrases at the beginning of each paragraph that signal a shift in thought, introduce new points, or reinforce earlier arguments. These linguistic devices, also called discourse markers or transition signals, play an important in shaping the flow and clarity of the text. For young writers, the choice and use of segment starters can reflect their grasp of discourse organization, rhetorical intention, and audience awareness.

In high school settings, where learners are learning to navigate more complex writing tasks, analyzing and scrutinizing how they begin their paragraphs in opinion-editorial writing can offer insights into their cognitive and linguistic development. However, little research has been done on how learners use segment starters in their opinion-editorial articles, especially at the secondary level.



Although various studies have analyzed discourse markers in academic and professional texts (e.g., Schiffrin, 1987; Hyland, 2005; McCarthy, 1992), few have focused specifically on how segment starters are utilized in learner-generated opinion-editorials at the high school level. Most discourse studies, such as those by Hyland (2005) and Coffin (2006), emphasize argumentative and expository writing in university settings. There is a notable gap in examining how secondary-level writers engage with genre-specific conventions like segment starters in journalism-oriented outputs. Thus, this study addresses a research gap by extending discourse analysis into the context of adolescent editorial writing, anchoring it on the need to understand genre alignment and rhetorical awareness in earlier stages of academic development. Exploring this aspect of learner writing may reveal not only common patterns and errors but also areas for targeted instruction in discourse structure and coherence.

This study, therefore, aimed to conduct a discourse analysis of segment starters used by the campus journalists in their editorial articles. Specifically, it sought to identify the types of segment starters they employ, examine their frequency and function, and interpret what these choices suggest about their writing competence and rhetorical strategies.

This study was anchored in the discourse analytical approach articulated by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), which views discourse not merely as a linguistic structure but as a form of social practice that both reflects and shapes reality. Within this framework, discourse is understood as a medium through which identities, knowledge, and social relationships are constructed. In the context of learner-produced opinion-editorial articles, segment starters linguistic elements that mark transitions, argument shifts, or new ideas are viewed as more than just textual devices. They serve as strategic choices that construct a writer's rhetorical stance, assert authority, engage readers, and establish coherence across the discourse.

This theoretical lens emphasizes that learners' use of segment starters is not arbitrary; rather, it is influenced by broader discursive structures,



such as genre conventions, institutional expectations, and sociocultural norms. Jørgensen and Phillips highlight interdiscursivity, the blending of multiple discourse types within a single text, which is particularly relevant for learners navigating the conventions of academic, journalistic, and informal writing simultaneously. Segment starters often draw from these overlapping sources, revealing how learners align with or resist dominant discourse norms.

Additionally, their framework focused on the role of discourse in shaping subjectivity. By analyzing the ways in which learners initiate and organize segments in their writing, we gain insight into how they position themselves in relation to their audience, topic, and socio-political context. For example, the use of phrases such as "In my opinion," or "Some might argue" demonstrates how learners adopt discursive positions that frame their authority and perspective. These linguistic choices contribute to the overall persuasive power and coherence of the text.

This framework enabled a critical examination of the ideologies embedded within learners' discourse practices. Since discourse both reflects and reinforces power relations, the study investigates whether learners unconsciously adopt mainstream argumentative structures or creatively challenge them through their unique use of segment starters. Thus, the theoretical foundation provided by Jørgensen and Phillips supports a nuanced understanding of how language use in learner writing operates within, and sometimes against, broader social and ideological patterns.

Furthermore, Michael McCarthy's approach to discourse analysis emphasizes the importance of understanding how language functions beyond isolated sentences, highlighting the organization and flow of ideas within extended discourse. McCarthy outlines how segment starters where linguistic markers like "Firstly," "In conclusion," "On the other hand," or "For example" are essential in structuring written discourse, particularly in argumentative and expository texts such as opinion-editorial articles.



In the context of this study, segment starters function as critical discourse markers that guide readers through shifts in argument, idea development, or topic changes. These starters serve as cohesive devices, linking one idea or section to another and providing clarity about the relationships between them. For example, Contrastive starters like “However” or “On the other hand” signal opposing views or shifts in perspective. Additive starters such as “Moreover” or “Additionally” introduce supplementary information. Exemplifying starters like “For example” or “Such as” offer clarification or illustrate points made earlier.

McCarthy’s analysis highlights that such devices are not merely functional in organizing discourse but are also deeply connected to the writer’s rhetorical strategy. Segment starters indicate the organizational logic of the text, showing how the writer presents, develops, or contrasts ideas.

By examining the use of these segment starters in learners’ writing, we can gain insights into their ability to structure complex ideas, signal transitions, and maintain coherence in their arguments. Additionally, learners’ use of these markers can reflect their understanding of the genre conventions of opinion-editorial writing, where argumentation, persuasion, and clarity are key.

Thus, McCarthy’s theoretical framework provides a basis for analyzing how segment starters help learners navigate the flow of discourse, while also offering an opportunity to examine their understanding of textual coherence, argumentative structure, and reader expectations.

In addition to recognizing the segment starters employed, this research also aims to examine how these linguistic signals indicate the writer’s purpose or argumentative shift, and how they enhance the logical flow and coherence of the text. In discourse, segment initiators or discourse markers are essential in guiding the writer’s rhetorical trajectory. McCarthy (1991) highlighted that discourse markers serve as signals of coherence and relational significance, assisting writers in organizing their arguments and creating links between thoughts. When strategically positioned, they can direct readers through the



progression of ideas, indicate shifts in reasoning, and convey contrast, emphasis, or elaboration which elements vital to argumentation in an opinion piece.

Further, the study examined how well the segment starters fit the rules of the opinion-editorial (op-ed) genre. persuasion and clarity are the featured needed for opinion-editorial Hyland (2005) stressed out that, elements like transitions and frame markers help writers connect with readers, express their views, and maintain a clear argument. Incorrect use of segment starters can make the flow illogical which can lead to misrepresentation of writer's intent or purpose which weakens the persuasive impact of the text. Therefore, looking at how learners use these tools reveals their understanding of text structure and their awareness of genre expectations.

This dual focus on rhetorical intent and genre conformity is based on the discourse-analytic framework proposed by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002). They see discourse as a space for creating meaning influenced by social and ideological contexts. Looking through this perspective, the learner's language choices, especially their use of segment starters, can be understood as discursive moves that show their cognitive and communication strategies. Thus, the study did not just list vocabulary items. It explored how segment starters function as tools for creating coherence, persuasion, and conformity with genre standards in adolescent writing.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design which is specifically grounded in written discourse analysis, to examine the use of segment starters in an opinion-editorial (op-ed) article written by a campus journalist and published in the latest volume of the Basilan National High School newspaper for English medium. Written discourse analysis was particularly appropriate for this inquiry because it allowed a detailed examination of how language is structured, organized, and functions within a text to convey meaning and achieve communicative goals.



The study focused on identifying and analyzing the starting words or phrases used at the beginning of each paragraph being referred to in this study as segment starters, as markers of discourse structure, coherence, and rhetorical function.

The primary source of data was one learner-written opinion-editorial article selected from the op-ed section of the most recent issue of Basilan National High School's learner publication. The chosen article was written in English and is representative of opinion-based writing as encouraged within the school's journalism organization. The article was chosen for its clear themes, well-organized paragraphs, and relevance to modern learner issues. This made it a good fit for analyzing how discourse is structured.

The selection was purposive and guided by criteria set in consultation with the school publication adviser which consist of a. coherence in paragraph structure, b. clarity in argument development, and c. the writer's use of language indicative of typical editorial style. It was not randomly chosen, but rather was considered as an exemplar which is based on its writing quality, its thematic focus, and alignment with genre expectations. As such, it serves as a representative case that enables in-depth discourse analysis of segment starters in learner writing.

The process of data collection followed a systematic procedure. The latest issue of the school paper was obtained with permission from the publication adviser. The article was selected in coordination with the editorial board to ensure it was an authentic learner-produced text. The article was transcribed exactly as printed, retaining its paragraph structure. Paragraph numbers were assigned to facilitate reference during analysis.

The researcher also made sure to seek informed consent from the student writer. The writer was made aware of the research objectives and was assured of confidentiality and the academic and research purpose of the analysis. The writer's identity was not exposed unless the writer gave clear permission to be acknowledged.

For each paragraph, the initial word or phrase was highlighted and extracted. These initial linguistic elements which often including transitional



words, conjunctions, adverbial phrases, or introductory clauses were labeled as segment starters.

The analysis consisted of three main phases. Each identified segment starter was classified according to its discourse function, drawing from categories established by McCarthy (1991), Halliday & Hasan (1976), and Schiffrin (1987). These categories include: Additive (e.g., “Moreover,” “In addition”), Contrastive (e.g., “However,” “On the other hand”), Causal (e.g., “Because of this,” “Therefore”), Sequential or Temporal (e.g., “Firstly,” “Then,” “Finally”), Exemplification or Illustration (e.g., “For example,” “Such as”), Conclusion or Summary (e.g., “In conclusion,” “To summarize”)

The function of each segment starter was examined about the surrounding paragraph and overall argument structure. To ensure analytical accuracy, the chosen segment starters underwent a manual coding procedure grounded in predefined categories from recognized discourse analysis frameworks. Each segment starter was initially categorized based on its discourse function utilizing typologies such as additive, contrastive, temporal, and concessive. An intercoder, a seasoned language educator proficient in discourse analysis, was engaged to independently code the identical data to verify the reliability of the coding. The percentage of agreement among the categories was calculated to determine the intercoder agreement, yielding a consistency rate of 83% using Cohen’s kappa method. Discrepancies were addressed and settled through collaborative review, ensuring that the ultimate coding decisions were verified, replicable, and conceptually robust. This phase of inter-coding diminished subjectivity and enhanced the trustworthiness of the analysis. Observations were documented about how segment starters contributed to or disrupted the cohesion and coherence of the article.

The final phase involved interpreting the findings in light of relevant discourse theories. Specifically, McCarthy’s (1991) insights on coherence and textual organization and Jørgensen & Phillips’ (2002) views on discourse as a social practice were used to explain how the learner used language to construct meaning, argument, and identity.



The relationship between the learner's use of segment starters and broader writing conventions of opinion-editorials was also explored. The study considered whether the learner conformed to or diverged from expected norms in journalistic writing, especially in constructing transitions, emphasis, or argumentative logic.

Results and Discussion

Identification of the segment starters used at the beginning of each paragraph

Analysis of the opinion-editorial article titled "Redefining the Honor Roll: Restoring Academic Integrity" revealed six paragraph-beginnings as follows:

M

Paragraph 1: "The honor roll has become a topic of discussion among educators, parents, and learners, especially with the recent awarding of honors. But is being on the honor list still a significant achievement?"

This was observed that there was a topical subject phrase opening the discussion (Topic introducer).

Paragraph 2: "The Department of Education (DepEd) has revised its grading system over the years to include broader metrics such as group activities, extracurricular participation, and project-based learning. While these changes aim for inclusivity, they have made it easier for learners to attain high grades, diminishing the honor roll's prestige."

There was an institutional noun phrase providing context (Background/Expository).

Paragraph 3: "Traditionally, earning a spot on the honor roll required considerable effort and mastery of lessons. Today, learners can achieve high grades with minimal effort, turning the honor roll into a superficial acknowledgment that fails to reflect true academic skills."



It pertained to a temporal adverb signaling a shift from past to present (Temporal–Contrastive starter).

Paragraph 4: Additionally, including extracurricular achievements in academic assessments blurs the distinction between academic and non-academic accomplishments. While commendable, extracurricular activities should not influence academic grades, as this undermines fairness and reduces the honor roll’s credibility.”

It used an additive connector introducing supplementary information (Additive/Amplifier).

Paragraph 5: “The honor roll is meant to reward genuine academic effort and mastery. However, its current state risks discouraging learners from prioritizing classroom learning and developing critical skills such as resilience and problem-solving.”

There was a restated subject phrase reinforcing a key concept (Reinforcing/Reframing).

Paragraph 6: “Although the revised grading system aims to promote inclusivity, it has strained the essence of academic recognition. Policymakers should refine criteria to separate academic and extracurricular achievements, ensuring the honor roll reflects true academic excellence.”

It pertained to a concessive subordinate clause acknowledging a counterpoint (Concessive/Evaluative starter).

In total, one additive marker, one temporal contrastive marker, one concessive/adversative marker, two topical-introducer phrases, and one backgrounding phrase were identified. This distribution corresponds to Halliday and Hasan’s cohesion types: additive, adversative (concessive), temporal, etc. (no causal or exemplifying starters were used).

Each segment starter performed a distinct rhetorical move that maintains logical flow.

In Paragraph 1, the opening “The honor roll has become a topic of discussion among educators, parents, and learners, especially with the recent awarding



honors. But is being on the honor list still a significant achievement?" immediately foregrounds the issue of academic integrity, effectively framing the editorial's topic. Such topicalizers act as discourse "segment leaders," orienting the reader to the main argument (Schiffrin 1987).

In Paragraph 2, "The Department of Education (DepEd) has revised its grading system over the years to include broader metrics such as group activities, extracurricular participation, and project-based learning. While these changes aim for inclusivity, they have made it easier for learners to attain high grades, diminishing the honor roll's prestige." provided needed background and policy context. Although not a classical connective, this expository opener serves as a cohesive bridge by grounding the argument in institutional facts.

Paragraph 3's starter "Traditionally, earning a spot on the honor roll required considerable effort and mastery of lessons. Today, learners can achieve high grades with minimal effort, turning the honor roll into a superficial acknowledgment that fails to reflect true academic skills." marks a temporal contrast between past and present practice. Halliday and Hasan note that temporal conjunctions/adverbials signal sequencing (e.g. "then", "after that"). The segment word "Traditionally" cues the reader that the text is comparing historical norms to current changes, thus linking the new argument to earlier context.

In Paragraph 4, the additive starter "Additionally, including extracurricular achievements in academic assessments blurs the distinction between academic and non-academic accomplishments. While commendable, extracurricular activities should not influence academic grades, as this undermines fairness and reduces the honor roll's credibility." explicitly builds on the prior point. Halliday and Hasan define additive connectors as those that "give additional information without changing the previous clause". This starter amplifies the argument by introducing a related concern, neatly cohesionizing the discourse (Schiffrin's "contextual coordinates" idea).

In Paragraph 5, the phrase "The honor roll is meant to reward genuine academic effort and mastery. However, its current state risks discouraging learners from prioritizing classroom learning and developing critical skills



such as resilience and problem-solving.” functions as a reinforcing restatement of purpose. By reiterating the honor roll’s intended function, the writer reframes the issue and maintains unity of topic. This resembles McCarthy’s examples of formulaic segment frames (e.g. “The fact is that...”, “The result is that...”) which learners use to structure texts.

Finally, Paragraph 6 opens with “Although the revised grading system aims to promote inclusivity, it has strained the essence of academic recognition. Policymakers should refine criteria to separate academic and extracurricular achievements, ensuring the honor roll reflects true academic excellence.”, a classic concessive marker. Halliday and Hasan categorize “although” as an adversative/concessive conjunction indicating contrast (expectation vs. reality)

Its use explicitly signals an opposing viewpoint or exception. This concessive move is crucial in argumentative writing, as it acknowledges potential objections while allowing the author to reaffirm her stance thereby enhancing argumentative clarity and coherence which is consistent with Schiffrin’s view that discourse markers help interpret relationships among segments).

Collectively, these starters produce a logical progression: the writer opens with the problem (Paragraph 1), situates it in context (Paragraph 2), contrasts past and present (Paragraph 3), adds new evidence (Paragraph 4), reiterates core values (Paragraph 5), and concedes an alternate view (Paragraph 6). This pattern reflects a conventional argumentative structure. Qualitatively, the segment-starter types align with McCarthy’s and Halliday’s categories (e.g. “Additionally” as additive; “Although” as adversative; “Traditionally” as temporal). In sum, each starter acts as a cohesive cue. They link ideas across paragraphs and clarify the writer’s moves.

These findings suggest the learner’s choices are largely appropriate for an op-ed. Opinion-editorials demand clear signposting of argument, and the use of “Additionally” and “Although” provides exactly that (these metadiscursive markers reflect audience awareness, as Hyland 2005 notes, by explicitly structuring the writer-reader interaction). The two topic-introducing phrases effectively serve as strong lead-sentences, a common



Sienes (2025). A discourse analysis of segment starters
- in adolescent Op-Ed articles.

journalistic technique. The mix of explicit connectors and straightforward topics matches typical editorial style: neither overly formal nor vague. The limited use of causal markers or exemplifiers is not uncommon in brief op-eds, which often prefer concise statements.

In sum, the segment starters enhance coherence and readability, guiding the reader through the argument. Only more varied frame markers (e.g. “In conclusion,” “Moreover”) might further strengthen transitions, but their absence does not critically undermine clarity.

Analysis on how the segment starters signal the writer’s intent or argumentative move and how they contribute to the logical progression and coherence of the text

In qualitative terms, the segment starters function as integral discourse organizers. By identifying them and examining their use, we see that each starter signals a clear rhetorical intention, whether to introduce a new point, elaborate on a claim, or counter an argument. The pattern of use fits op-ed convention the writer generally uses appropriate additive and contrastive cues to maintain logical progression. In the editorial article, they do exactly that, yielding a coherent, genre-appropriate argumentative flow.

The way each segment starter is used shows that the writer knows how to guide readers through the argument clearly and persuasively. Instead of just listing points, the learner skillfully employs these markers to shape the development of ideas throughout the editorial. The sequence from identifying the problem, providing context, making contrasts, adding details, reinforcing points, to making concessions shows not just clear structure but also careful planning. This supports the logical flow of the editorial. Each paragraph starts with a segment starter that signals to the reader a specific argumentative move, making it easier to understand and keeping them engaged.

This paper analyzes the specific rhetorical roles that segment starters play in the learner’s writing. Segment starters such as “However,” “Additionally,” and “Although” are used not merely as connectors, but as signals of argumentative moves—contrast, reinforcement, and concession



respectively. Their presence indicates an understanding of how to guide readers through claims and counterclaims.

Recent studies affirm that discourse markers are critical in projecting stance and building engagement. According to Lee (2020), such markers enhance rhetorical clarity and help position the writer's argument in reader-friendly ways. González and González (2017) further explain that skilled use of these devices reflects writing maturity and a grasp of communicative intent. The learner's use of these segment starters, therefore, shows an early but effective application of rhetorical strategy in line with opinion-editorial conventions.

For example, the word "Additionally" in Paragraph 4 shows that the writer understands the need to elaborate on a previous claim. This introduces a related but distinct point that strengthens the argument without repeating it. This additive marker signals continuity and provides new evidence, enhancing the persuasive nature of the paragraph. Likewise, the use of "Although" in Paragraph 6 is a classic way to acknowledge an opposing view or a potential counterpoint before presenting a refined position. This strategy shows awareness of balance and fairness in arguments, boosting the author's credibility by offering a nuanced perspective.

According to Hyland (2005), these metadiscourse markers are key for managing the relationship between the writer and the reader, as well as organizing complex information in persuasive writing. They act as clear signs of how the text is organized, guiding the reader through the reasoning stages while keeping the writer's voice clear. In this context, the learner's use of "Additionally" and "Although" functions not just as transitions but as markers that shape the argument, control the flow, and involve the reader in a discussion. These choices reflect a growing skill in structuring discourse with intent and purpose, showing that the writer is not simply presenting information in chronological order but is deliberately building an argument that unfolds strategically.

Furthermore, this ability to use segment starters to show argumentative changes indicates a developing skill in matching language tools with communication goals. Instead of relying on standard paragraph openers or vague topic sentences, the learner uses discourse markers that consider the



reader's needs, highlight contrasts, and stress logical progression. This shows a growing rhetorical awareness, especially in managing tone and cohesion in a journalistic setting. The skill to shift from general context to specific claims and adjust stance when needed indicates not just a grasp of syntax but also an intuitive sense of how persuasive writing works in real-world contexts like opinion editorials.

In addition, the flow of the editorial advances in a rational argumentative pattern. All segment starters contribute towards generating the rhythm of the text and cognitive signposting for the reader. The transitions are context-sensitive and smooth, meaning that the author intuitively understands how to introduce new perspectives while still sustaining topic continuity. The constant mention of the honor roll throughout paragraphs also speaks well of thematic coherence, reminding readers of the main issue while having each paragraph add something different. These rhetorical techniques propose the establishment of mastery of cohesion not just through syntax and grammar but also through deliberate discourse organization.

The editorial has a clear argument structure. Each segment starter works as a signal that guides the text's flow and rhythm. These markers are not just simple connectors; they are tools that help organize the logical development of ideas throughout the article. Each paragraph opener gives the reader a clue about the theme and direction, showing how the upcoming content is related to what has already been said, whether by adding, contrasting, elaborating, or conceding. This careful arrangement of discourse markers shows that the writer understands how important it is to have a good progression in opinion writing.

Schiffrin (1987) and McCarthy (1991) highlight that discourse markers are more than just transitional tools; they are essential for making meaning across different sections. These elements help create a cohesive text by showing the speaker's stance, marking changes in perspective, and managing the interaction between the text and the reader. The editorial's strong use of segment starters supports this idea, showing that the writer has started to understand how discourse markers help keep arguments clear and flowing.



As Halliday and Hasan (1976) point out, cohesion works not just at the level of grammar and syntax but also across longer stretches of text. In this case, segment starters act as cohesive links that tie together themes, rhetorical goals, and structural parts across paragraphs. This connection between paragraphs is a sign of skilled writing and reflects the writer's ability to keep consistent thoughts while leading the reader through complex arguments. Connor (1996) emphasizes the importance of coherence and cohesion in second language writing, noting that effective academic texts require writers to balance small-scale transitions with large-scale planning. The writer's use of segment starters shows this balance well—each marker serves both a local role at the paragraph level and a global role at the text level in shaping meaning and persuasion.

Thematic consistency is also maintained, as evidenced by the repeated return to the central concept of the honor roll throughout the editorial. Each paragraph not only advances the argument but also reconnects to the overarching theme, reinforcing the editorial's persuasive goal. This recursive reference to the main topic ensures that the reader remains anchored in the central issue, even as the writer introduces new dimensions, such as grading policies, fairness, or student motivation. Such thematic anchoring contributes to what Nation (2009) describes as thematic coherence—a defining characteristic of effective academic writing. Thematic coherence is achieved when ideas are systematically connected through shared vocabulary, consistent topic focus, and purposeful transitions, allowing the reader to follow the argument without losing track of its relevance or direction.

The learner's segment starters also serve to structure the editorial's overall flow, helping maintain coherence across paragraphs. Each marker introduces or extends an idea while keeping the discussion anchored to the central theme which is the honor roll policy. This consistency reveals an awareness of discourse progression and thematic control. The editorial follows a recognizable argumentative arc: establishing the issue, presenting context, expressing personal position, and conceding counterpoints. This structure is reinforced through markers that clarify how each paragraph relates to the previous. Nation (2009) highlights that thematic coherence is a hallmark of academic writing, often signaled by consistent lexical choices



structural devices. Zheng (2021) adds that transitions play a significant role in reader comprehension, and that well-placed discourse markers can improve perceived cohesion even in developing writers.

In this case, the learner's use of familiar segment starters such as additive and contrastive markers not only aids logical flow but also supports thematic development. These markers frame the beginning of each paragraph in a way that signals both continuation and conceptual alignment with the editorial's central concern. For example, when the writer transitions from policy changes to their consequences, the discourse markers used guide the reader while simultaneously restating or reframing the honor roll's value in each context. This reinforces cohesion on both the lexical and discourse levels, strengthening the text's overall clarity and persuasiveness.

The ability to maintain thematic unity across multiple paragraphs is a sign of emerging rhetorical maturity. It demonstrates that the writer is not only focused on constructing individual paragraphs but also on designing a whole text that functions as an integrated persuasive act. In line with Hyland (2004), such thematic control reflects genre awareness and a growing sensitivity to audience expectations, both of which are crucial for writing in public-facing formats like opinion-editorials. This coherence also supports reader comprehension by establishing clear expectations for how the discussion unfolds, helping the reader draw connections between evidence, reasoning, and the main argument. Ultimately, the learner's consistent thematic orientation enhances the editorial's impact by reinforcing its central message at every turn.

While a greater range of discourse markers—such as exemplification or stronger causal links could have added further nuance, their absence does not critically impact coherence. Taboada (2009) points out that effective coherence depends more on how discourse signals align with communicative purpose than on their variety or frequency. In this case, the student-writer's choices balance rhetorical clarity with genre suitability. Similarly, Xing and Ma (2010) highlight that in learner writing, especially at the secondary level, successful use of even basic discourse markers is a strong indicator of genre awareness and textual control.



Evaluation on the appropriateness of the segment starters in relation to the conventions of the opinion-editorial (op-ed) genre

The learner's choices of segment starters align with the stylistic and rhetorical expectations of the opinion-editorial genre, which values both clarity and persuasive tone. These choices demonstrate a sensitivity to audience and purpose—core components of genre awareness. Segment starters like “Although” and “However” show the writer's ability to anticipate reader responses and build persuasive momentum by acknowledging complexity.

Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory suggests that such choices reflect how writers position themselves socially and evaluative in text. The learner's rhetorical decisions indicate not just grammatical knowledge but also an emerging control over genre-specific conventions. As Hyland (2005) explains, interactional metadiscourse such as transitions and stance markers is central to shaping reader engagement and coherence in persuasive writing. The learner's use of these markers, while not highly varied, is appropriate and consistently effective, demonstrating developing proficiency.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the learner is developing both rhetorical sensitivity and genre adaptability. The segment starters not only fulfill their cohesive function but also reflect strategic, context-appropriate choices that support the editorial's argumentative purpose. This aligns with studies such as Bolton et al. (2020), who argue that guided use of discourse markers improves clarity and persuasiveness in EFL students' writing. Thus, the analysis supports the value of explicitly teaching segment starters as tools for organizing, persuading, and conforming to the norms of genre-specific writing.

In summary, among six paragraphs, the segment-starter distribution was: 2 topical-introducers, 1 backgrounding phrase, 1 additive connector, 1 temporal contrastive connector, and 1 concessive connector. This variety is qualitatively consistent with Halliday and Hasan's cohesion categories and



supports the writer's goal of a clear, persuasive editorial (as recommended in McCarthy 1991 and others). The predominance of explicit transitions underlines the learner's attempt to signal coherence in an argumentative op-ed, fulfilling the study's objectives.

This study deliberately employed an exemplary case analysis approach to provide an in-depth examination of segment starter use within a single editorial article. While multiple samples could offer broader generalizability, the choice of a well-crafted learner text allows for detailed qualitative insights into rhetorical and structural features. Acknowledging the limitation of using only one sample, this analysis does not aim to generalize findings to all learner writings but rather to highlight the nuanced discourse strategies possible in a high-performing learner text. Future research may expand this inquiry by analyzing a corpus of learner-written op-eds to identify common patterns and deviations across writing proficiencies.

Conclusion

Conducted as a discourse analysis, the study examined segment starters in adolescent learners' opinion-editorial articles to assess how adolescent writers organize discourse, express argumentation, and achieve text coherence. Six segment starters were identified and categorized according to discourse marker typology and cohesion strategies. Each segment starter carried a specific rhetorical function: to introduce topics, to build arguments, to contrast points, or to concede alternate views. These choices in language provided significantly to the logical flow of the article and its coalescence as a text type.

The results suggest that the learner displayed a gradually developing consciousness of rhetorical structure and genre expectations. Generally, the segment starters utilized were appropriate for the opinion-editorial form and exhibited the writer's ability to guide the reader, indicate argumentative moves, and maintain thematic focus. The marked slightness of distinction could not deter the coherence of the editorial through firm framing of topics and prudent application of discourse signals. That supports the observation that the segment starters are more than mere transitional devices; they actually serve as major tools of rhetoric for the construction of persuasion.



This analysis also underscored the value of coherence as a writer's deliberate action and not an aftereffect of grammatical accuracy. The learner's application of segment starters not only indicates sentence-level fluency but also an emerging ability to predict how readers will process information between paragraphs. By framing these shifts, continuities, and contrasts, the segment starters assisted the writer in sustaining argumentative clarity and keeping the editorial anchored in a core theme. This implies that coherence in student writing has much to do with rhetorical choice, and that even simple discourse markers used in a strategic manner can really make learner texts much more readable and persuasive.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that writing instruction, especially at the secondary level, include explicit teaching of segment starters and other discourse markers. Teachers should emphasize how these elements contribute to argumentative structure, coherence, and audience engagement. Classroom activities might involve identifying segment starters in authentic texts, practicing their use in guided writing, and analyzing their rhetorical impact. Incorporating genre-based approaches to teaching editorials and other persuasive texts can further enhance learners' awareness of discourse conventions.

The learners themselves must also keep themselves abreast to the format and style of writing an opinion-editorial article, for this will not only be useful in the field of journalism but also on how to give arguments to an issue like in debates and other activities that require the use of segment starters. The learners must also be aware of the function of each segment starter to further aid them in understanding to what they are writing. With that, they may serve as role models to other aspiring campus journalists and be able to also peer sharing of ideas.

School paper advisers are also encouraged to integrate discourse-focused writing exercises in their journalism training programs. Beyond evaluating content accuracy and grammar, advisers can mentor learner journalists on the effective use of segment starters to improve the logical organization and



persuasive tone of their articles. Peer-review workshops and editorial conferences may be enhanced by including guided feedback sessions specifically focused on cohesion and paragraph transitions.

Additionally, the school paper advisers may also provide specific training on the use of segment starters in journalistic writing. These segment starters should be given emphasis on the clear transitions and logical flow in opinion-editorial articles especially for campus journalists who are writing in the opinion-editorial section of the school paper publication. This will further improve their journalistic skills especially learners also join in some regional and national press conferences where they apply their skills in writing articles especially the opinion-editorial genre.

Moreover, teachers across content areas that require writing especially English subject can coordinate efforts to foster consistency in learners' discourse strategies. Writing rubrics may include indicators for coherence and rhetorical flow to reinforce the value of segment starters in both academic and journalistic writing. When learners understand how to use discourse markers purposefully, they are better equipped to write not only to inform but also to argue, reflect, and persuade.

Further, teachers can provide explicit instruction on segment starters. In conducting lesson on discourse markers, the teacher should explain the functions using examples from an opinion-editorial article then provide a categorized list of common segment starters which highlight their differences in meaning and usage in the paragraph. It is evidently the role of the teacher to also provide genre-based writing activities wherein learners analyze model texts such as the opinion-editorial articles, identifying and discussing the segment starters used and their effectiveness in achieving the writer's purpose.

Finally, future research may explore a broader set of learner-written editorials to examine patterns across writing proficiency levels. A comparative study involving multiple writers could provide deeper insights into how segment starter use evolves with writing experience. Studies might also investigate the relationship between segment starter choices and overall writing quality, or how targeted instruction impacts learners' discourse strategies over time.



References

- Bolton, K., Nelson, G., & Hung, J. (2020). *Learner English in Asia: Insights from corpus linguistics*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Coffin, C. (2006). *Historical discourse: The language of time, cause and evaluation*. Continuum.
- Connor, U. (1996). *Contrastive rhetoric: Cross-cultural aspects of second-language writing*. Cambridge University Press.
- Discourse markers. (n.d.). *Warwick University Academic English Skills*. <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/globalpad-rip/openhouse/academicenglishskills/grammar/discourse/>
- Dreyer, C., & Nel, C. (2003). Teaching reading strategies and reading comprehension within a technology-enhanced learning environment. *System*, 31(3), 349–365. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0346251X03000472>
- González, F., & González, J. A. (2017). The use of discourse markers in EFL writing: A corpus-based analysis. *System*, 69, 92–104. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0346251X17306383?via%3Dihub>
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. Longman.
- Hedge, T. (2005). *Writing* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press. <https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-ESLEFL-Reading-and-Writing/Nation-Macalister/p/book/9780367433765?srsId=AfmBOoolIfPmVysIk9Y1lxx5msbM5AG7cdvq89eb6WrameObKr44ZKrV>
- Hyland, K. (2004). *Genre and second language writing*. University of Michigan Press.
- Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Continuum.
- Lee, I. (2020). Teaching coherence in EFL writing: Theory to practice. *RELC Journal*, 51(2), 224–237.
- Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. R. (2005). *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. R. (2005). *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillan. [https://www.prrwhite.info/Martin%20and%20White,%202005,%20CHPT%203%20\(sample\)%20The%20Language%20of%20Evaluation.pdf](https://www.prrwhite.info/Martin%20and%20White,%202005,%20CHPT%203%20(sample)%20The%20Language%20of%20Evaluation.pdf)



- McCarthy, M. (1991). *Discourse analysis for language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, M. (1992). Discourse analysis for language teachers. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 8(1), 96–100. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/026565909200800108>
- Nation, I. S. P. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL reading and writing*. Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-ESLEFL-Reading-and-Writing/Nation/p/book/9780415989686>
- Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Schiffrin, D. (1987). *Discourse markers*. Cambridge University Press.
- STKIP Kie Raha Ternate Online Journal System. (n.d.). <https://jurnal.isdikkieraha.ac.id/>
- Taboada, M. (2009). Discourse markers and coherence relations in English and Spanish. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(2), 257–275.
- Xing, M., & Ma, X. (2010). Enhancing cohesion in EFL students' writing: The use of discourse markers. *International Education Studies*, 3(3), 129–134.
- Zheng, Y. (2021). Transition devices and coherence in L2 English essays: A multi-dimensional analysis. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 49, 100942. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED565451.pdf>

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Acknowledgement

With the hands that helped, minds that shared, and hearts that inspired, I express my immense gratitude to those whose unending support and reinforcement served as a vital channel and steady anchor to the fulfillment and success of the study.

About the author

Joyce Ethel L. Sienes is a Master Teacher I of Basilan National High School with twelve years of teaching experience. She graduated Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English at Ateneo de Zamboanga University. She finished her Master's Degree at Western Mindanao State University. Known for her commitment to both academics and values formation, she



believes that every learner has the potential to glitter when given the guidance and opportunity.

E-mail: joyceethel.sienes@deped.gov.ph