

TOEFL SPEAKING MASTERY

Top 100 *Transitional Words* & Phrases to Score 26+ on TOEFL Speaking

The Complete Guide to Speaking More Fluently, Clearly, and
Naturally in the TOEFL Speaking Test

LEARN BETTER ENGLISH · MASTER TOEFL

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★ HOW TO USE THIS EBOOK

Read chapters in order for the full learning journey, or jump directly to Chapter 3 for the master transition list and Chapter 11 for quick review. Use the flashcards in Chapter 12 and the practice tracker in Appendix D for daily study.

INTRODUCTION

Why Transition Words Matter

The invisible glue that holds your speaking together

If you have ever listened to a high-scoring TOEFL Speaking response and tried to figure out what made it sound so smooth, the answer is almost certainly this: transitional words. These small connecting phrases are the invisible glue that holds ideas together, allowing listeners to follow your thoughts without effort. They are the difference between a response that feels like a list of disconnected sentences and one that flows like a thoughtful, well-organized conversation.

Many TOEFL students spend months memorizing vocabulary, practicing grammar, and recording themselves, only to receive a Speaking score that does not reflect their effort. The reason is rarely a lack of English knowledge. More often, the problem is coherence. The student can speak, but their ideas do not connect smoothly. They jump from one point to another without

warning, leaving the listener (and the rater) struggling to keep up. This ebook exists to fix that exact problem.

| Why ETS Cares About Transitions

The Educational Testing Service (ETS), which administers the TOEFL iBT, evaluates speaking across four official scoring criteria: Delivery, Language Use, Topic Development, and (under the new rubric introduced in July 2025) a holistic consideration of coherence and progression. Transitions directly influence at least three of these. Delivery improves because transitions give you micro-pauses to breathe and to organize your next thought. Language Use improves because transitions are exactly the kind of "discourse markers" that raters listen for when judging whether your English sounds natural. Topic Development improves because transitions make the structure of your argument visible to the rater.

A response without transitions often sounds like a stream of consciousness. A response with too many transitions sounds robotic. The goal is the middle path: a natural, confident use of five to eight well-chosen transitions per response, distributed across the beginning, middle, and end. This is exactly what native speakers do without thinking, and it is exactly what this ebook will train you to do deliberately until it becomes automatic.

I DID YOU KNOW?

ETS raters listen to hundreds of responses each week. They cannot rewind or pause the audio. This means your response must make sense the first time it is heard. Transitions are the most reliable tool for making your ideas instantly understandable.

| How Transitions Improve Coherence

Coherence is the logical connection between ideas. When your speaking is coherent, the listener can predict what is coming next, even if they have never heard your specific argument before. Transitions create this predictability by signaling relationships: "I am about to add a point," "I am about to contrast two ideas," "I am about to give an example," "I am about to conclude." Each transition tells the listener's brain how to file the upcoming information, which dramatically reduces cognitive load.

Imagine listening to someone describe a city. Without transitions, you hear: "The food is great. The traffic is bad. The museums are world-class. The pollution is high." Are these pros? Cons? A balanced view? Without transitions, the listener has to do all the interpretive work themselves. Now imagine the same content with transitions: "On the one hand, the food is great and the museums are world-class. On the other hand, the traffic is bad and the pollution is high." Suddenly the structure is clear: two pros, two cons, a balanced judgment. The information is identical, but the coherence has been transformed.

COMPARE THESE TWO RESPONSES

Without transitions: *I like online learning. It is flexible. It is cheap. I can study at home. I miss my classmates. I cannot focus sometimes.*

With transitions: *To begin with, I like online learning primarily because it is flexible and affordable. In addition, I can study from the comfort of my home. However, I do miss my classmates, and as a result, I sometimes struggle to focus.*

| How to Study This Ebook

This ebook is not designed to be read in a single sitting. It is a workbook, a reference, and a practice companion all in one. The most effective approach is to move through it in three passes. In the first pass, read the chapters in order to understand the full system: why transitions matter, how ETS scores them, and how the 100 transitions in this book fit into 20 functional categories. Do not try to memorize anything yet. Just absorb the logic.

In the second pass, focus on Chapter 3, which contains the master list of 100 transitions. Choose five to eight transitions from different categories that feel natural to you and that you can imagine yourself actually using. These will become your personal toolkit. Do not try to master all 100. Even the highest-scoring TOEFL candidates regularly use only about 15 to 20 transitions across all their speaking tasks. The goal is depth, not breadth. A few transitions used naturally are worth far more than many transitions used awkwardly.

In the third pass, work through the practice chapters (Chapters 5, 9, and 10). Record yourself, listen back critically, and identify which transitions you used successfully and which ones still feel forced. Use the flashcards in Chapter 12 for spaced repetition, and use the cheat sheets in Chapter 11 for quick review before each practice session.

★ PRO TIP: THE 5-TRANSITION MINIMUM

Aim to use at least five different transitions in every full-length speaking response you practice. This is the minimum threshold for a response to sound structured rather than random. Most Band 26+ responses use between six and nine.

| How to Practice Every Day

Consistent daily practice beats occasional marathon sessions every time. Even 15 minutes a day, if done deliberately, will produce more improvement than three hours once a week. The key is to combine three elements: input (listening to natural English), processing (studying how transitions function), and output (producing your own speech with transitions).

A simple daily routine looks like this. Start with five minutes of listening to a short English podcast, lecture, or interview. As you listen, write down every transition the speaker uses and notice where it appears in their sentence. Then spend five minutes reviewing three transitions from Chapter 3 of this book, reading the examples aloud. Finally, spend five minutes answering a TOEFL-style independent speaking prompt, deliberately using at least three of the transitions you

reviewed. Record yourself, listen back, and circle the transitions you used successfully in your notes.

Chapter 9 of this ebook provides structured 7-day, 14-day, and 30-day practice plans that build on this basic routine. If you follow the 30-day plan to completion, you will have answered over 90 practice questions, recorded yourself over 30 times, and used every transition in your personal toolkit at least 20 times. By that point, the transitions will feel automatic, and your fluency will have noticeably improved.

! A WARNING ABOUT OVERUSE

Once students discover the power of transitions, they sometimes start every sentence with one. This is just as bad as using no transitions at all. The goal is variety and naturalness. If you find yourself using 'furthermore' three times in a single response, stop and rewrite. Variety is the signature of a high-scoring speaker.

Welcome to your journey toward a 26+ on TOEFL Speaking. By the end of this ebook, you will not only know 100 transitional words and phrases, you will understand how to use them strategically, how to avoid the common mistakes that hold most students back, and how to develop a daily practice habit that will continue to improve your speaking long after you finish this book. Turn the page and let us begin.

CHAPTER 1

Understanding TOEFL Speaking

Structure, scoring, and where transitions fit in

Before you can use transitions strategically, you need to understand the test you are using them for. The TOEFL iBT Speaking section has undergone significant changes over the years, and the current version (introduced in July 2023 and refined in 2025) consists of four tasks that together take about 16 minutes to complete. Each task tests a slightly different skill, and transitions play a different role in each one.

| Independent vs. Integrated Tasks

The Speaking section contains one independent task and three integrated tasks. The independent task (Task 1) asks you to express your opinion on a familiar topic. You will have 15 seconds to prepare and 45 seconds to speak. This is the only task that is purely about your own

ideas, which means it is the task where transitions matter most for structuring your argument, because you have complete freedom over what to say and how to organize it.

The three integrated tasks require you to combine information from reading passages, listening passages, and (in Task 3) brief lectures or conversations. In these tasks, you have 30 seconds to prepare and 60 seconds to speak. The challenge here is not coming up with ideas, but organizing information you have just absorbed. Transitions in integrated tasks serve a slightly different purpose: they signal to the rater that you understand the logical structure of the source material and can reproduce it accurately.

1 TASK BREAKDOWN

Task 1 (Independent): Opinion on a familiar topic. 15s prep, 45s speaking.

Task 2 (Integrated): Campus situation. Read a notice, listen to a conversation, summarize. 30s prep, 60s speaking.

Task 3 (Integrated): Academic reading and lecture. Explain a concept using lecture examples. 30s prep, 60s speaking.

Task 4 (Integrated): Academic lecture. Summarize key points. 20s prep, 60s speaking.

| The Four Scoring Criteria

ETS evaluates TOEFL Speaking responses on four criteria, each worth an equal portion of your overall score. Understanding these criteria is essential because they tell you exactly what the rater is listening for. Transitions influence three of the four criteria directly, and the fourth (Delivery) is indirectly affected because well-placed transitions give you natural micro-pauses that improve your fluency.

The four criteria are: Delivery, Language Use, Topic Development, and a holistic consideration of coherence and progression. Each rater listens to your response and assigns a score from 0 to 4 for each criterion. These scores are then combined and converted to a scaled score from 0 to 30. To achieve a 26 or higher (the threshold for "advanced" speaking), you typically need an average of 3.5 or above across all criteria, which means scoring at least 3 on every criterion and 4 on at least one.

| Criterion | What Raters Listen For | How Transitions Help |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Delivery | Pronunciation, pace, intonation, smoothness, effort required to understand | Transitions create natural pauses, giving you time to breathe and plan the next sentence, which improves overall fluency. |
| Language Use | Vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, automaticity, idiomatic phrasing | Discourse markers (transitions) are exactly the kind of advanced language use that raters listen for as a sign of natural English. |
| Topic Development | Relevance, completeness, progression of ideas, clear structure | Transitions make your argument structure visible. Raters can instantly identify your main point, supporting reasons, examples, and conclusion. |
| Coherence | Logical flow, ease of following the argument, clear relationships between ideas | Transitions are the explicit signals of logical relationships. Without them, coherence must be inferred. With them, coherence is explicit. |

Fluency: The Foundation of High Scores

Fluency is not the same as speed. Many students confuse the two and try to speak as fast as possible, believing that fast equals fluent. This is a serious mistake. Fluency means smooth, continuous, natural-paced speech with appropriate pauses, rhythm, and intonation. A fluent speaker may speak relatively slowly, but every word is clear and every pause is purposeful. A non-fluent speaker may speak quickly, but with hesitations, restarts, and "um"s that make them hard to follow.

Transitions directly support fluency because they give you natural moments to pause and breathe. When you say "On the other hand," you have a built-in half-second to organize your next thought. When you say "For example," you have a moment to recall the specific example you want to use. Native speakers use transitions partly for this reason, often unconsciously. You should use them consciously until they become automatic.

★ FLUENCY HACK

If you feel yourself running out of breath or losing your train of thought, use a transition phrase like 'That said,' or 'In other words,' to buy yourself two seconds. Raters hear this as natural coherence, not as hesitation.

Coherence: The Logical Backbone

Coherence refers to how logically your ideas connect to each other. A coherent response has a clear structure: an opening, a body with two or three supporting points, and a brief conclusion. Each idea flows into the next, and the listener never has to wonder how you got from one point to another. Coherence is what separates a Band 24 response from a Band 27 response. The

Band 24 speaker has good ideas but presents them in a way that requires effort to follow. The Band 27 speaker has the same ideas but presents them in a way that is effortless to follow.

The single most effective way to improve coherence is to use transitions that explicitly signal the relationship between your ideas. When you say "First," the listener knows to expect a "Second." When you say "However," the listener knows to expect a contrast. When you say "Therefore," the listener knows to expect a conclusion. Each transition is a signpost that tells the listener where you are in your argument and where you are going next.

| Delivery: How You Sound

Delivery encompasses everything about how your speech physically sounds: pronunciation, intonation, stress, pacing, and smoothness. Raters assess delivery by asking whether a listener would have to make an unusual effort to understand you. A score of 4 means the listener understands you effortlessly. A score of 2 means the listener has to work hard, but eventually understands. A score of 1 means the listener frequently misses what you are saying.

Transitions help delivery because they create natural rhythmic breaks in your speech. English is a stress-timed language, which means the rhythm comes from stressed syllables occurring at regular intervals. Transition words, which are typically unstressed function words followed by a stressed content word, fit naturally into this rhythm. "For example, MANY students..." has a clear, natural beat. Compare this to "Many students for example, who are..." which has no clear rhythm and sounds choppy.

| Language Use: Vocabulary and Grammar

Language Use evaluates the richness and accuracy of your vocabulary and grammar. Raters look for whether you can use a range of structures (simple, compound, complex sentences) and whether your word choices are natural and precise. They are also listening for "discourse markers," which is the technical term for transitional words and phrases. Using a variety of transitions correctly is one of the clearest signals of advanced language use.

However, language use is also where many students lose points by using transitions incorrectly. Saying "Furthermore" when you mean "However," or pairing "Although" with "but" in the same sentence, signals to the rater that your command of these structures is shaky. This is why Chapter 8 of this book is dedicated entirely to common mistakes. Mastering transitions means knowing not just when to use them, but also when not to.

| Topic Development: Building a Complete Argument

Topic Development assesses whether your response fully addresses the question, whether your ideas are relevant and well-developed, and whether your argument progresses logically from start to finish. A score of 4 means your response is complete, relevant, and well-organized. A score of 2 means it is partial or disorganized. Topic Development is the criterion most directly

influenced by your use of transitions, because transitions are what create the visible structure of your argument.

A well-developed response typically follows one of two structures. The first is the "opinion plus two reasons" structure, ideal for Task 1: state your opinion, give your first reason with an example, give your second reason with an example, and conclude briefly. The second is the "summary plus key points" structure, ideal for Tasks 2 through 4: introduce what you are summarizing, present the first key point, present the second key point, and conclude. Transitions mark each stage of these structures, making the development visible to the rater.

✓ SCORE BOOSTER

Before you start speaking, take 5 of your 15 preparation seconds to write down three transition words you plan to use. For example: 'To begin with / In addition / Ultimately.' This simple habit will instantly structure your response and boost your Topic Development score.

Now that you understand the structure of the TOEFL Speaking section and the four scoring criteria, you can see exactly why transitions deserve the attention this ebook gives them. They are not a "nice to have" feature of advanced English. They are a "must have" feature of any response that aims for a Band 26 or higher. In the next chapter, we will look at the science behind why native speakers use transitions so constantly, and what cognitive processes are at work when transitions make speech easier to understand.

CHAPTER 2

The Science Behind Natural English

Why native speakers constantly use transitions, and why your brain needs them

If you have ever wondered why native English speakers seem to sprinkle their speech with "I mean," "you know," "like," and "so" almost constantly, the answer is not laziness or lack of vocabulary. It is cognitive efficiency. The human brain processes language in real time, and both speakers and listeners need frequent structural signals to keep communication smooth. Transitions are the most important of these signals, and understanding the science behind them will make you a much more strategic speaker.

| Why Native Speakers Constantly Use Transitions

Linguistic research over the past forty years has consistently shown that natural spoken English is filled with discourse markers, the technical term for transitional words and phrases. Studies of conversational English find that native speakers use a discourse marker roughly every 10 to 15 seconds, on average. This is not a sign of unpolished speech. It is a sign of fluent, naturally

flowing communication. The markers serve crucial cognitive and communicative functions that the brain depends on.

One major function is what linguists call "floor management." When a speaker says "Well," or "So," at the start of a turn, they are signaling that they are taking the floor and the listener should yield. When they say "You know," mid-sentence, they are checking that the listener is still following. When they say "Anyway," they are signaling a return to the main topic after a digression. None of these markers carries literal meaning, but each carries crucial interactional information that makes the conversation work.

In TOEFL Speaking, you do not have a conversational partner, so the floor-management function is less relevant. But the structural function is even more important. Without a listener to give you feedback, you must use transitions to make your structure explicit and self-evident. The rater is essentially a passive listener who has only one chance to understand your response. Transitions are how you make that one chance count.

I DID YOU KNOW?

A famous 1980s study by linguist Deborah Schiffrin found that the word 'so' alone serves at least seven distinct functions in spoken English: introducing a conclusion, marking a question, opening a topic, summarizing, checking understanding, marking cause-effect, and signaling the end of a turn. Native speakers use these functions automatically. As a learner, you can deliberately use 'so' for any of them.

| Cognitive Flow: How the Brain Produces Speech

Producing speech is one of the most cognitively demanding tasks the human brain performs. In any given second of speaking, your brain is doing at least four things simultaneously: retrieving vocabulary, organizing syntax, articulating sounds, and planning what comes next. Working memory, which is the mental workspace where all this happens, has a strictly limited capacity. Any technique that reduces the cognitive load frees up resources that can be used for higher-quality speech.

Transitions reduce cognitive load because they are highly practiced, semi-automatic chunks. When you say "On the other hand," you do not have to think about the syntax or the vocabulary. The phrase is stored in your brain as a single unit. While your mouth is producing that phrase, your brain is free to plan the actual content of the next sentence. This is why native speakers often use transitions as "filler" when they are thinking. They are not wasting time. They are buying time.

For TOEFL candidates, this means transitions are not just about coherence. They are also a fluency tool. If you have ever found yourself freezing mid-sentence, unable to think of what to say next, the cause is often a cognitive overload. Your brain was trying to plan syntax, vocabulary,

and content all at once. A well-placed transition breaks this bottleneck by giving your brain a micro-pause to catch up.

TRY THIS EXPERIMENT

Record yourself answering a TOEFL question without any transitions. Then record yourself answering the same question using a transition at the start of every sentence. You will likely find that the second version sounds more fluent, even though you spoke at the same speed. That is the cognitive flow effect in action.

| Listener Comprehension: Reducing Cognitive Load on the Rater

Just as transitions reduce cognitive load for the speaker, they reduce cognitive load for the listener. When you hear a sentence, your brain does not just register the words. It actively constructs the meaning by predicting what is coming next, integrating each new word with the previous context. This predictive process is what allows you to understand speech in real time, even though individual words are often ambiguous.

Transitions feed this predictive process by telling the listener's brain what kind of information is coming. When you hear "For example," your brain prepares to file the next clause as an illustration. When you hear "However," your brain prepares to file the next clause as a contrast. This preparation makes the actual information easier to process, because the brain already has a "slot" ready for it. Without transitions, the brain has to wait until the end of each sentence to figure out what role it played in the argument, which is exhausting over the course of a 60-second response.

This is particularly important for TOEFL raters, who may listen to dozens of responses in a single sitting. Cognitive fatigue is real. A rater who has been grading for three hours will unconsciously reward responses that are easy to process and penalize responses that require extra effort. Transitions make your response easy to process. They are, in effect, a courtesy to the rater, and the rater will repay the courtesy with a higher score.

★ MEMORY TRICK

Think of transitions as 'file folder labels' for the rater's brain. Each transition tells the rater where to file the upcoming information. The clearer your labels, the easier it is for the rater to organize and remember your argument.

| Examples: Transitions in Action

Let us look at three short examples that demonstrate how transitions transform a response. Each pair below contains the same content, but the second version uses transitions strategically. Notice not just the difference in flow, but the difference in how confident and authoritative the speaker sounds.

EXAMPLE 1: INDEPENDENT TASK (OPINION)

Without transitions: *I think online learning is good. It saves time. I do not have to commute. I can study when I want. It can be lonely. I miss my friends.*

With transitions: *In my opinion, online learning is mostly positive. To begin with, it saves time because I do not have to commute. In addition, I can study whenever I want. That said, it can be lonely, and as a result, I sometimes miss my friends.*

EXAMPLE 2: INTEGRATED TASK (SUMMARY)

Without transitions: *The reading explains the concept of cognitive load. The professor gives an example. He talks about learning to drive. At first, driving takes all your attention. Later, it becomes automatic. This shows the concept.*

With transitions: *The reading passage explains the concept of cognitive load. To illustrate, the professor describes the process of learning to drive. Initially, driving requires all of your attention. However, over time, it becomes automatic. This example clearly demonstrates how cognitive load decreases with practice.*

EXAMPLE 3: CONTRASTING VIEWPOINT

Without transitions: *Some people like working from home. Some people prefer the office. Home is quiet. The office has colleagues. Both have benefits.*

With transitions: *While some people prefer working from home, others favor the office. On the one hand, home offers a quiet environment. On the other hand, the office provides valuable face-to-face interaction with colleagues. Ultimately, both settings have their distinct benefits.*

| The Natural English Hypothesis

From all of this, we can state what might be called the Natural English Hypothesis: a speaker who uses transitions naturally and appropriately will sound more fluent, more coherent, and more advanced than a speaker with the same vocabulary and grammar who does not use transitions. This is not just an aesthetic preference. It reflects the deep cognitive architecture of how human beings process spoken language.

The practical implication for TOEFL candidates is profound. You do not need to learn hundreds of new vocabulary words. You do not need to master complex grammatical structures you have never used before. You need to take the transitions you already know and learn to use them deliberately, strategically, and naturally. That is what the next chapter, the heart of this ebook, will help you do.

✓ SCORE BOOSTER

Spend the next 24 hours listening to native English speakers in podcasts, lectures, or interviews. Count how many transitions they use per minute. You will likely find that the count is much higher than you expected. This is the target you are aiming for: not perfection, but naturalness.

CHAPTER 3

The Top 100 Transitional Words & Phrases

The complete master list, organized by function

This is the heart of the ebook. Below you will find all 100 transitional words and phrases, organized into 20 functional categories with five transitions in each. For every entry, you will see its function, a speaking example, a natural alternative, the difficulty level, and the most common mistake students make with that transition. Read this chapter carefully, mark the transitions that feel most useful for your personal speaking style, and return to it often as a reference.

A note on difficulty levels: "Beginner" transitions are short, common, and easy to use correctly. They should form the backbone of your speaking. "Intermediate" transitions are slightly more formal or nuanced, and they signal to the rater that your English is advancing. "Advanced" transitions are less common, more sophisticated, and should be used sparingly for maximum impact. A response that uses only advanced transitions sounds unnatural, just as a response that uses only beginner transitions sounds basic. The goal is a balanced mix.

★ HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

Do not try to memorize all 100 transitions. Instead, choose 15 to 20 from different categories that feel natural to you. Mark them, practice them daily for two weeks, and they will become automatic. The rest of the transitions are valuable as reference and as alternatives when you want to vary your speech.

1 First of all

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Starting a point |
| EXAMPLE | <i>First of all, I think technology makes our lives easier.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | To begin with |
| MISTAKE | Do not repeat 'first of all' multiple times in one answer. |

2 To begin with

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Introducing the first point |
| EXAMPLE | <i>To begin with, online learning offers great flexibility.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Let me start by saying |
| MISTAKE | Avoid using both 'first of all' and 'to begin with' in the same response. |

3 To start with

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Opening a topic |
| EXAMPLE | <i>To start with, students need a quiet study environment.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | First and foremost |
| MISTAKE | Do not confuse with 'to start' which is a verb phrase, not a transition. |

4 First and foremost

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Highlighting the most important point |
| EXAMPLE | <i>First and foremost, health should always come before work.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Above all |
| MISTAKE | Use only when the first point is genuinely the most important one. |

5 Let me start by saying

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Personal introduction to a topic |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Let me start by saying that I fully support this idea.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | I would like to begin by |
| MISTAKE | Make sure to follow with an actual statement, not another transition. |

6 In addition

BEGINNER

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Adding a new point |
| EXAMPLE | <i>In addition, the new library has more study rooms.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Additionally |
| MISTAKE | Do not pair with 'also' in the same sentence; it becomes redundant. |

7 Furthermore

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Adding stronger supporting information |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Furthermore, the campus offers free tutoring services.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Moreover |
| MISTAKE | Avoid starting two consecutive sentences with 'furthermore'. |

8 Moreover

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Adding weight to an argument |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Moreover, students can access online journals anytime.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | What's more |
| MISTAKE | Do not use 'moreover' and 'furthermore' in the same paragraph. |

9 Additionally

BEGINNER

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Adding supporting detail |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Additionally, the professor provides recorded lectures.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | On top of that |
| MISTAKE | Make sure the new information actually supports the previous point. |

10 On top of that

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Casually adding emphasis |
| EXAMPLE | <i>On top of that, the tuition fee is quite affordable.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Besides that |
| MISTAKE | Slightly informal; avoid using in very formal academic responses. |

11 For example

BEGINNER

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Introducing a specific example |
| EXAMPLE | <i>For example, many universities now offer hybrid courses.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | For instance |
| MISTAKE | Always follow with an actual example, not another general statement. |

12 For instance

BEGINNER

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Providing one specific case |
| EXAMPLE | <i>For instance, my cousin improved her English through online courses.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Such as |
| MISTAKE | Do not pair with 'like' when listing multiple examples. |

13 Such as

BEGINNER

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Listing examples within a sentence |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Many modern tools, such as Grammarly, help students write better.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Including |
| MISTAKE | Do not use 'such as' at the start of a sentence; use 'for example' instead. |

14 Namely

ADVANCED

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Specifying exactly what is meant |
| EXAMPLE | <i>There are two main reasons, namely time and cost.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Specifically |
| MISTAKE | Use only when naming specific items, not when giving a general example. |

15 To illustrate

ADVANCED

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Introducing a clarifying example |
| EXAMPLE | <i>To illustrate, consider how smartphones changed communication.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | As an illustration |
| MISTAKE | Follow with a concrete example, not another abstract claim. |

16 The main reason is that

INTERMEDIATE

- FUNCTION** Stating the primary cause
- EXAMPLE** *The main reason is that students learn at different speeds.*
- ALTERNATIVE** Primarily because
- MISTAKE** *Make sure the following clause actually states a reason, not an effect.*

17 One important reason is

INTERMEDIATE

- FUNCTION** Introducing one key reason
- EXAMPLE** *One important reason is the lack of qualified teachers.*
- ALTERNATIVE** A key factor is that
- MISTAKE** *Avoid using 'one important reason' more than twice in one response.*

18 Another reason is that

BEGINNER

- FUNCTION** Adding a second reason
- EXAMPLE** *Another reason is that group work builds communication skills.*
- ALTERNATIVE** Additionally, because
- MISTAKE** *Only use after you have already given the first reason.*

19 This is because

INTERMEDIATE

- FUNCTION** Explaining why something is true
- EXAMPLE** *Group projects are valuable. This is because they mimic real workplaces.*
- ALTERNATIVE** That is due to the fact that
- MISTAKE** *Do not use 'this is because' as a sentence opener without prior context.*

20 Primarily because

ADVANCED

- FUNCTION** Highlighting the strongest reason
- EXAMPLE** *I prefer online learning, primarily because of its flexibility.*
- ALTERNATIVE** Mainly due to
- MISTAKE** *Use a comma before 'primarily because' when it appears mid-sentence.*

21 Because

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Stating a direct cause |
| EXAMPLE | <i>I chose this university because it has a strong engineering program.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Since |
| MISTAKE | Do not start every sentence with 'because'; it sounds repetitive. |

22 Since

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Giving a reason already known |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Since the deadline is tomorrow, we should work quickly.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | As |
| MISTAKE | Avoid ambiguity: 'since' can also refer to time. |

23 As

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Introducing a cause briefly |
| EXAMPLE | <i>As the weather was bad, the match was cancelled.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Given that |
| MISTAKE | Place the 'as' clause at the start of the sentence for clarity. |

24 Due to

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Identifying a cause (noun phrase) |
| EXAMPLE | <i>The flight was delayed due to heavy rain.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Owing to |
| MISTAKE | Do not follow 'due to' with a full clause; use a noun phrase. |

25 Owing to

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Formally attributing a cause |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Owing to high demand, the company expanded its services.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Because of |
| MISTAKE | More formal than 'due to'; avoid in casual speech. |

26 Therefore

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Stating a logical result |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Therefore, students should plan their schedules carefully.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | As a result |
| MISTAKE | Use a comma after 'therefore' when it starts a sentence. |

27 As a result

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Showing consequence |
| EXAMPLE | <i>As a result, the project was completed ahead of schedule.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Consequently |
| MISTAKE | Do not use 'as a result' if no clear cause has been mentioned. |

28 Consequently

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Indicating an outcome |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Consequently, the school revised its admission policy.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Hence |
| MISTAKE | Often overused; vary with 'as a result' or 'therefore'. |

29 As a consequence

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Formally stating an effect |
| EXAMPLE | <i>As a consequence, attendance dropped significantly.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | For this reason |
| MISTAKE | Slightly formal; do not pair with 'so' in the same sentence. |

30 For this reason

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Justifying a conclusion |
| EXAMPLE | <i>For this reason, I believe morning classes are more effective.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | That is why |
| MISTAKE | Use only after a clear reason has been stated. |

31 However

BEGINNER

- FUNCTION** Introducing a contrast
- EXAMPLE** *However, not all students benefit from online learning.*
- ALTERNATIVE** On the other hand
- MISTAKE** Avoid starting three sentences in a row with 'however'.

32 On the other hand

INTERMEDIATE

- FUNCTION** Presenting an opposing view
- EXAMPLE** *On the other hand, classroom learning offers face-to-face interaction.*
- ALTERNATIVE** In contrast
- MISTAKE** Use only when both sides of an argument are being discussed.

33 In contrast

INTERMEDIATE

- FUNCTION** Highlighting a sharp difference
- EXAMPLE** *In contrast, rural schools often lack basic resources.*
- ALTERNATIVE** By contrast
- MISTAKE** Do not use 'in contrast' and 'on the other hand' back-to-back.

34 Nevertheless

ADVANCED

- FUNCTION** Conceding a point but continuing
- EXAMPLE** *Nevertheless, the program has produced positive results.*
- ALTERNATIVE** Nonetheless
- MISTAKE** Use only after acknowledging a counter-argument.

35 Whereas

INTERMEDIATE

- FUNCTION** Comparing two things directly
- EXAMPLE** *Whereas urban students have many options, rural ones do not.*
- ALTERNATIVE** While
- MISTAKE** Make sure both clauses are parallel in structure.

36 Similarly

BEGINNER

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Showing likeness |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Similarly, online shoppers value fast delivery.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Likewise |
| MISTAKE | Use only when the previous point genuinely resembles the new one. |

37 Likewise

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Adding a comparable point |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Likewise, employees prefer flexible working hours.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | In the same way |
| MISTAKE | Avoid using both 'similarly' and 'likewise' in the same paragraph. |

38 In the same way

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Drawing a parallel |
| EXAMPLE | <i>In the same way, children learn by watching adults.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Correspondingly |
| MISTAKE | Make sure the comparison is logical before using this phrase. |

39 Compared to

BEGINNER

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Direct comparison |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Compared to last year, sales have doubled.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | In comparison with |
| MISTAKE | Use a noun or noun phrase after 'compared to', not a full clause. |

40 By the same token

ADVANCED

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Drawing a logical parallel |
| EXAMPLE | <i>By the same token, teachers also need time to rest.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Similarly enough |
| MISTAKE | Often confused with 'in the same way'; 'by the same token' is more logical, not descriptive. |

41 In my opinion

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Stating personal view |
| EXAMPLE | <i>In my opinion, daily reading improves vocabulary more than any app.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | I believe that |
| MISTAKE | Do not overuse; once or twice per response is enough. |

42 I believe that

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Asserting personal conviction |
| EXAMPLE | <i>I believe that group discussion deepens understanding.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | From my perspective |
| MISTAKE | Avoid using 'I believe' and 'in my opinion' in the same sentence. |

43 From my perspective

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Framing a viewpoint |
| EXAMPLE | <i>From my perspective, group work builds teamwork skills.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | From my point of view |
| MISTAKE | Pair with a clear statement, not another opinion marker. |

44 As far as I'm concerned

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Stating a personal stance |
| EXAMPLE | <i>As far as I'm concerned, both options are acceptable.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Personally speaking |
| MISTAKE | Slightly informal; do not use in formal academic writing tasks. |

45 To my mind

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Offering a thoughtful opinion |
| EXAMPLE | <i>To my mind, practical experience matters more than theory.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | I would argue that |
| MISTAKE | British English flavor; less common in American speech. |

46 I agree that

BEGINNER

- FUNCTION** Directly agreeing
- EXAMPLE** *I agree that exercise improves mental focus.*
- ALTERNATIVE** I share the view that
- MISTAKE** Follow with a reason; do not stop at 'I agree' alone.

47 Absolutely

BEGINNER

- FUNCTION** Strong agreement
- EXAMPLE** *Absolutely, the new policy will help students.*
- ALTERNATIVE** Without a doubt
- MISTAKE** Avoid in formal academic responses; better suited to conversation.

48 That's true

BEGINNER

- FUNCTION** Acknowledging a valid point
- EXAMPLE** *That's true, and it also applies to working professionals.*
- ALTERNATIVE** Indeed
- MISTAKE** Use a comma after 'that's true' to separate it from the next clause.

49 Indeed

INTERMEDIATE

- FUNCTION** Reinforcing a statement
- EXAMPLE** *Indeed, the data supports this conclusion.*
- ALTERNATIVE** Undeniably
- MISTAKE** Do not use 'indeed' to introduce a contrast; it strengthens agreement.

50 I share that view

ADVANCED

- FUNCTION** Expressing alignment
- EXAMPLE** *I share that view, especially regarding flexible schedules.*
- ALTERNATIVE** I'm of the same opinion
- MISTAKE** Make sure the previous speaker actually expressed a view, not a fact.

51 I'm afraid I disagree

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Polite disagreement |
| EXAMPLE | <i>I'm afraid I disagree with that view.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | I see it differently |
| MISTAKE | Always follow with a reason; otherwise it sounds abrupt. |

52 On the contrary

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Directly opposing |
| EXAMPLE | <i>On the contrary, I found the lecture quite engaging.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Actually |
| MISTAKE | Do not confuse with 'on the other hand'; 'on the contrary' denies the previous statement. |

53 I see it differently

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Soft disagreement |
| EXAMPLE | <i>I see it differently, mainly because the cost is too high.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | From my point of view, however |
| MISTAKE | Use only when you actually disagree, not to introduce a different topic. |

54 That said

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Limiting or qualifying a point |
| EXAMPLE | <i>The plan is good. That said, it needs more funding.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Having said that |
| MISTAKE | Use a period before 'that said', not a comma. |

55 Not necessarily

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Gently rejecting a conclusion |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Not necessarily; some students prefer printed books.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | I wouldn't say that |
| MISTAKE | Avoid in formal essays; it sounds too conversational. |

56 In other words

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Restating for clarity |
| EXAMPLE | <i>In other words, students need consistent practice.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | That is to say |
| MISTAKE | Use only when actually rephrasing; not as a filler. |

57 That is to say

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Specifying meaning |
| EXAMPLE | <i>The course is self-paced; that is to say, you finish at your own speed.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Namely |
| MISTAKE | Use a semicolon or period before this phrase, not a comma. |

58 To put it another way

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Rephrasing an idea |
| EXAMPLE | <i>To put it another way, learning is a marathon, not a sprint.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | What I mean is |
| MISTAKE | Do not use this phrase if your rephrasing does not change the wording significantly. |

59 What I mean is

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Clarifying intent |
| EXAMPLE | <i>What I mean is that practice must be deliberate, not random.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | What I'm trying to say is |
| MISTAKE | Slightly conversational; avoid using repeatedly in one answer. |

60 Specifically

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Narrowing to a detail |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Specifically, students need help with reading comprehension.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | In particular |
| MISTAKE | Always follow with a concrete detail, not another generalization. |

61 To sum up

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Concluding briefly |
| EXAMPLE | <i>To sum up, technology brings both benefits and challenges.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | In short |
| MISTAKE | Use only at the end of a response, not in the middle. |

62 In short

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Brief restatement |
| EXAMPLE | <i>In short, careful planning leads to better results.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Briefly put |
| MISTAKE | Do not use 'in short' if your summary is longer than two sentences. |

63 Overall

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | General assessment |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Overall, the new system has improved efficiency.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | All in all |
| MISTAKE | Avoid 'overall' if you have not presented multiple points yet. |

64 All in all

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Final evaluation |
| EXAMPLE | <i>All in all, the trip was a great success.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | On the whole |
| MISTAKE | Slightly informal; better for personal narratives than academic essays. |

65 On the whole

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | General summary |
| EXAMPLE | <i>On the whole, students performed better this semester.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Generally speaking |
| MISTAKE | Use only when summarizing multiple observations, not a single point. |

66 In conclusion

BEGINNER

- FUNCTION Formal closing
- EXAMPLE *In conclusion, balanced learning is the best approach.*
- ALTERNATIVE To conclude
- MISTAKE Use only once, at the very end of the response.

67 To conclude

INTERMEDIATE

- FUNCTION Direct final statement
- EXAMPLE *To conclude, both methods have their merits.*
- ALTERNATIVE In closing
- MISTAKE Do not introduce new information after this phrase.

68 Finally

BEGINNER

- FUNCTION Marking the last point
- EXAMPLE *Finally, I would emphasize the role of self-discipline.*
- ALTERNATIVE Last but not least
- MISTAKE Use only when genuinely stating the last point, not for emphasis.

69 Last but not least

INTERMEDIATE

- FUNCTION Final important point
- EXAMPLE *Last but not least, parents play a crucial role.*
- ALTERNATIVE Finally and importantly
- MISTAKE Avoid in formal academic writing; better for spoken answers.

70 Ultimately

ADVANCED

- FUNCTION Final judgment
- EXAMPLE *Ultimately, success depends on consistent effort.*
- ALTERNATIVE In the end
- MISTAKE Use only for the most important conclusion, not every ending.

71 By the way

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Casual shift |
| EXAMPLE | <i>By the way, the deadline has been extended.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Incidentally |
| MISTAKE | Too casual for academic responses; better in informal speech. |

72 Incidentally

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Adding a related side note |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Incidentally, the professor also wrote a book on this topic.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | As an aside |
| MISTAKE | Use only when the side note is genuinely related to the topic. |

73 Speaking of which

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Connecting to a previous point |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Speaking of which, I read an interesting article yesterday.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | On that note |
| MISTAKE | Make sure the new topic actually relates to the previous one. |

74 That reminds me

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Triggering a memory |
| EXAMPLE | <i>That reminds me, I need to submit my assignment tonight.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | On the subject of |
| MISTAKE | Avoid in academic responses; very informal. |

75 Moving on

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Signaling a new topic |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Moving on, let's consider the second issue.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Turning to |
| MISTAKE | Use only when you genuinely change topics, not for adding a related point. |

76 If

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Stating a condition |
| EXAMPLE | <i>If students practice daily, their fluency improves quickly.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Provided that |
| MISTAKE | Do not mix tenses inappropriately in conditional sentences. |

77 Unless

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Stating a negative condition |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Unless we act now, the problem will worsen.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Except if |
| MISTAKE | Use a present tense after 'unless' for future meaning. |

78 Provided that

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Setting a strict condition |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Provided that funding continues, the program will expand.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | As long as |
| MISTAKE | Do not use 'provided that' and 'if' in the same sentence. |

79 As long as

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Setting a flexible condition |
| EXAMPLE | <i>As long as you practice, you will see progress.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | So long as |
| MISTAKE | Do not use 'as long as' for negative conditions; use 'unless'. |

80 In case

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Preparing for a possibility |
| EXAMPLE | <i>In case of bad weather, the event will move indoors.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Should it happen that |
| MISTAKE | Use 'in case of' (with 'of') before nouns, 'in case' (no 'of') before clauses. |

81 Meanwhile

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Showing simultaneous action |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Meanwhile, the teachers prepared new materials.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | In the meantime |
| MISTAKE | Use a comma after 'meanwhile' at the start of a sentence. |

82 In the meantime

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Indicating what happens while waiting |
| EXAMPLE | <i>In the meantime, students can review their notes.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Meanwhile |
| MISTAKE | Do not use 'in the meantime' if no waiting period is implied. |

83 Eventually

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Showing a final outcome over time |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Eventually, the team found a workable solution.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | In the end |
| MISTAKE | Avoid 'eventually' if the outcome is immediate. |

84 Subsequently

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Showing what followed |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Subsequently, the school adopted the new policy.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Later on |
| MISTAKE | Do not use 'subsequently' for immediate cause-effect; use 'as a result'. |

85 Meanwhile, however

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Showing simultaneous contrast |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Meanwhile, however, costs continued to rise.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | At the same time, though |
| MISTAKE | Use only when both simultaneity and contrast are present. |

86 First

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Marking the first step |
| EXAMPLE | <i>First, gather all the relevant information.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | To begin with |
| MISTAKE | Use only when listing steps; avoid for single points. |

87 Second

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Marking the second step |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Second, analyze the data carefully.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Next |
| MISTAKE | Use only after 'first' has been stated. |

88 Next

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Moving to the next step |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Next, identify the main trends.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Then |
| MISTAKE | Avoid 'next' if you have already used 'second'. |

89 Then

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Showing sequence |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Then, present your findings to the class.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | After that |
| MISTAKE | Do not overuse; vary with 'next' or 'after that'. |

90 After that

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Indicating subsequent action |
| EXAMPLE | <i>After that, review your conclusions once more.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Following that |
| MISTAKE | Use only when describing a clear sequence, not parallel actions. |

91 In fact

BEGINNER

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Strengthening a claim |
| EXAMPLE | <i>In fact, the results exceeded our expectations.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Actually |
| MISTAKE | Use only to add weight, not to introduce new information. |

92 Indeed

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Reinforcing truth |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Indeed, regular practice is the key to fluency.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Truly |
| MISTAKE | Do not use 'indeed' to soften a claim; it strengthens it. |

93 Without a doubt

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Strong emphasis |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Without a doubt, education transforms lives.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Undeniably |
| MISTAKE | Use only when the claim is genuinely undeniable. |

94 Undoubtedly

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Marking certainty |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Undoubtedly, teamwork produces better ideas.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Certainly |
| MISTAKE | Avoid if the claim has any room for debate. |

95 Above all

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Highlighting the most important point |
| EXAMPLE | <i>Above all, students must stay motivated.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Most importantly |
| MISTAKE | Use only when one point clearly outweighs all others. |

96 I would recommend

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Suggesting an action |
| EXAMPLE | <i>I would recommend starting with short practice sessions.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | It is advisable to |
| MISTAKE | Follow with a base verb, not 'to + verb' twice. |

97 It is advisable to

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Formal recommendation |
| EXAMPLE | <i>It is advisable to review notes within 24 hours.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | I suggest that |
| MISTAKE | Slightly formal; avoid in casual speaking tasks. |

98 I suggest that

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Personal suggestion |
| EXAMPLE | <i>I suggest that students record themselves daily.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Why not |
| MISTAKE | Use the base verb after 'suggest that' (subjunctive), not 'to + verb'. |

99 You might want to

INTERMEDIATE

| | |
|-------------|--|
| FUNCTION | Soft suggestion |
| EXAMPLE | <i>You might want to try shadowing native speakers.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | It might help to |
| MISTAKE | Avoid in formal academic essays; better for spoken advice. |

100 The best approach is to

ADVANCED

| | |
|-------------|---|
| FUNCTION | Strong recommendation |
| EXAMPLE | <i>The best approach is to combine reading and speaking practice.</i> |
| ALTERNATIVE | Ideally, you should |
| MISTAKE | Use only when the recommendation is genuinely the best one. |

Building Your Personal Toolkit

Now that you have seen all 100 transitions, it is time to build your personal toolkit. The most effective approach is to choose one or two transitions from each of the 20 categories. This gives

you a balanced set of about 20 to 25 transitions that you can use across any TOEFL Speaking task. Write these down on a single page, tape it to your wall, and review it daily for two weeks.

As you practice, you will find that some transitions feel more natural than others. This is normal and good. Your toolkit should reflect your personal speaking style, not a generic list. Some speakers naturally prefer "First of all" while others prefer "To begin with." Some speakers use "However" frequently while others prefer "On the other hand." Both are correct. The goal is to find the set that sounds most like you when you are speaking at your best.

! COMMON MISTAKE

Do not change your toolkit every week. Consistency is the key to fluency. Once you have chosen your transitions, stick with them for at least 30 days. Only then should you consider adding or replacing items. Frequent changes prevent the transitions from becoming automatic.

✓ SCORE BOOSTER

Once you have your toolkit of about 20 transitions, write each one on a flashcard (see Chapter 12 for printable flashcards). Shuffle the deck each morning and pull five cards. Those are your transitions of the day. Use all five in your practice responses that day. This simple drill will dramatically accelerate your fluency.

CHAPTER 4

High-Scoring TOEFL Speaking Templates

Frameworks for every task, with transitions built in

Templates are not crutches. They are scaffolding that helps you organize your thoughts under time pressure. The four templates below cover every TOEFL Speaking task, with transitions already placed where they naturally fit. Memorize the structure, not the exact words. The goal is to internalize the rhythm so that when you sit for the real test, the framework is automatic and your brain is free to focus on the actual content.

! IMPORTANT NOTE ON TEMPLATES

Templates should never sound like templates. Once you have internalized the structure, vary your wording, change the order slightly, and make each response your own. Raters can recognize robotic template use, and it lowers your Language Use score. The transitions matter; the exact phrasing does not.

| Task 1: Independent Speaking Template

Task 1 asks for your opinion on a familiar topic. You have 15 seconds to prepare and 45 seconds to speak. The most reliable structure is "opinion, two reasons, brief conclusion." Aim for about 60 to 75 words total, which is roughly five to seven sentences. Use transitions to mark each stage of the argument.

1 Task 1 Template

In my opinion, [state your opinion clearly]. **To begin with**, [first reason with brief example]. **In addition**, [second reason with brief example]. **For this reason**, [brief conclusion that restates your opinion in different words].

SAMPLE TASK 1 RESPONSE

In my opinion, students should be required to learn a second language in school. **To begin with**, knowing another language opens up more career opportunities in our globalized economy. **For instance**, my cousin got a job at an international firm mainly because she spoke both English and Mandarin. **In addition**, learning a language also deepens cultural understanding, which is increasingly important. **For this reason**, I strongly believe language education should be mandatory.

2 Task 1 Alternative Template (Compare/Contrast)

While some people prefer [option A], **I personally favor** [option B]. **The main reason is that** [primary advantage of B]. **On the other hand**, [acknowledge advantage of A]. **However**, [explain why B's advantage outweighs A's]. **Ultimately**, [conclude].

SAMPLE COMPARE/CONTRAST RESPONSE

While some people prefer studying alone, **I personally favor** studying in groups. **The main reason is that** group study allows me to learn from my peers' perspectives. **On the other hand**, studying alone can be more efficient when reviewing familiar material. **However**, the collaborative benefits of group study usually outweigh the efficiency of solo review. **Ultimately**, I find I retain information better when I have discussed it with others.

| Task 2: Integrated Speaking (Campus Situation)

Task 2 gives you a reading passage about a campus change (about 75-100 words, 45-50 seconds to read) and then a conversation between two students about the change (1-2 minutes to listen).

You must summarize the change and the speaker's opinion. You have 30 seconds to prepare and 60 seconds to speak. Aim for about 90 to 110 words.

2 Task 2 Template

According to the reading, the university [announces/plans] [summarize the change]. **In the conversation**, the man/woman [agrees/disagrees] with this change. **First**, he/she argues that [first reason from listening]. **Specifically**, [brief detail/example]. **In addition**, he/she points out that [second reason]. **For these reasons**, the student [supports/opposes] the new policy.

SAMPLE TASK 2 RESPONSE

According to the reading, the university plans to extend library hours during finals week. **In the conversation**, the woman strongly agrees with this change. **First**, she argues that many students work during the day and can only study late at night. **Specifically**, she mentions that she herself works a part-time job and often cannot start studying until 9 PM. **In addition**, she points out that the library is the only quiet place on campus where students can focus. **For these reasons**, the student fully supports the new policy.

Task 3: Integrated Speaking (Academic Reading and Lecture)

Task 3 gives you a short reading passage defining an academic concept (75-100 words, 45-50 seconds to read) and then a lecture that gives one or two examples illustrating the concept (1-2 minutes to listen). You must explain how the examples relate to the concept. You have 30 seconds to prepare and 60 seconds to speak. Aim for about 90 to 110 words.

3 Task 3 Template

The reading passage defines [concept name] as [brief definition]. **In the lecture**, the professor illustrates this concept using [one/two] example(s). **First**, he/she describes [first example]. **Specifically**, [key detail]. **This clearly demonstrates** [concept] because [connection to definition]. **In addition**, the professor mentions [second example or detail]. **Ultimately**, these examples show how [concept] works in practice.

SAMPLE TASK 3 RESPONSE

The reading passage defines cognitive dissonance as the mental discomfort people feel when their actions contradict their beliefs. **In the lecture**, the professor illustrates this concept using a personal example. **First**, he describes how he always believed in environmental conservation but drove an old, polluting car. **Specifically**, he mentions feeling guilty every time he filled up the gas tank. **This clearly demonstrates** cognitive dissonance because his actions (driving a polluting car) directly contradicted his beliefs. **In addition**, he explains that he eventually resolved the discomfort by purchasing an electric vehicle. **Ultimately**, this example shows how cognitive dissonance can motivate behavioral change.

Task 4: Integrated Speaking (Academic Lecture)

Task 4 gives you only a lecture (no reading). The lecture is typically 1.5 to 2.5 minutes and explains a concept with two examples or two sub-points. You must summarize the main idea and the two examples. You have 20 seconds to prepare and 60 seconds to speak. Aim for about 100 to 120 words.

4 Task 4 Template

In the lecture, the professor discusses [main topic]. **Specifically,** he/she explains that [key idea or definition]. **To illustrate,** the professor provides two examples. **First,** he/she describes [first example]. **The key point here is that** [connection to main idea]. **Furthermore,** the professor mentions [second example]. **This further demonstrates** [main idea]. **In summary,** both examples show how [topic] works in different contexts.

SAMPLE TASK 4 RESPONSE

In the lecture, the professor discusses how animals use camouflage to avoid predators. **Specifically,** she explains that camouflage allows animals to blend into their surroundings, making them difficult to detect. **To illustrate,** the professor provides two examples. **First,** she describes the leaf-tailed gecko, whose skin perfectly mimics the texture and color of tree bark. **The key point here is that** predators cannot distinguish the gecko from the actual tree. **Furthermore,** the professor mentions the Arctic hare, whose white fur blends into the snow during winter. **This further demonstrates** how camouflage adapts to different environments. **In summary,** both examples show how camouflage works as a survival strategy across species.

Customizing Your Templates

The templates above are starting points, not rigid scripts. As you practice, you will find that some phrasings feel more natural to you than others. Make those substitutions. The transitions matter; the surrounding words can be adjusted to fit your voice. What you should not change is the underlying structure: state the main idea, present the first point or example, present the second point or example, and conclude briefly.

One common mistake is to over-fill the template with so many transitions that the response feels mechanical. Aim for five to seven transitions in a 45-second response, and seven to nine in a 60-second response. More than that sounds forced. Less than that sounds disorganized. The right number is just enough to make the structure clear without overwhelming the listener.

★ PRACTICE DRILL

Record yourself using the Task 1 template five times in a row, with five different prompts. Do not worry about content quality at first. Focus only on using the template smoothly and naturally. After five repetitions, the structure will start to feel automatic. Then start varying the wording slightly while keeping the underlying framework.

✔ SCORE BOOSTER

After each practice response, count your transitions. If you used fewer than five, your response is probably under-structured. If you used more than nine, your response is probably over-structured. Aim for the sweet spot of six to eight.

CHAPTER 5

Model Answers (Band 26+)

Annotated examples for every speaking task

Below are ten complete model answers, two for each TOEFL Speaking task. Every transitional word or phrase is highlighted in **blue** so you can see exactly where and how they fit. After each response, you will find Vocabulary Notes, Grammar Notes, and Speaking Tips that explain why each transition works and what makes the response score in the Band 26 to 30 range. Study these models carefully and use them as benchmarks for your own practice recordings.

In my opinion, universities should definitely require students to take at least one physical education course. **To begin with**, many college students lead extremely sedentary lifestyles, sitting in classrooms all day and studying late into the night. **As a result**, their physical and mental health often suffer. A required PE course would force them to move regularly, **which in turn** would improve their focus and academic performance. **Furthermore**, learning a sport in college can build a lifelong healthy habit. **Ultimately**, I believe this requirement would benefit students long after graduation.

VOCABULARY NOTES

Strong phrases: *extremely sedentary lifestyles, forced to move regularly, lifelong healthy habit*. Note the precise adjective 'sedentary' instead of 'inactive' shows advanced vocabulary.

GRAMMAR NOTES

Complex sentence with relative clause: 'would force them to move regularly, which in turn would improve...'
Note the conditional structure with 'would' for hypothetical reasoning.

SPEAKING TIPS

Six transitions in 45 seconds is on the higher end but works because the response is well-paced. Practice this response out loud and notice how each transition gives you a natural micro-pause.

While some people prefer to study alone, **I personally find** group study much more effective. **The main reason is that** explaining concepts to others forces me to truly understand the material. **For instance**, when I struggled with calculus last semester, my study group asked me to explain derivatives, and that process clarified my own confusion. **In addition**, studying with peers keeps me motivated and accountable, **since** I am less likely to skip a session when others are counting on me. **For these reasons**, I strongly prefer group study.

VOCABULARY NOTES

Effective use of *accountable* and *clarified my own confusion*. These phrases show vocabulary depth without sounding forced.

GRAMMAR NOTES

Note the contrast structure 'While X, I find Y' which immediately signals the comparison. The subordinate clause 'since I am less likely to...' efficiently compresses two ideas into one sentence.

SPEAKING TIPS

This response uses a 'compare and contrast' structure rather than the typical 'opinion plus two reasons.' Variety in structure keeps your speaking fresh and prevents you from sounding scripted.

According to the reading, the university has announced a new policy requiring all freshmen to live on campus for their first year. **In the conversation,** the man strongly agrees with this decision. **First,** he argues that living on campus helps new students build a sense of community. **Specifically,** he mentions that he made his closest friends during his freshman year in the dormitory. **In addition,** he points out that freshmen often struggle with time management and that being close to classes and the library helps them stay on track. **For these reasons,** he believes the new policy will benefit incoming students.

VOCABULARY NOTES

Useful phrases: *sense of community, stay on track, incoming students*. These collocations sound natural and academic.

GRAMMAR NOTES

The sentence 'he points out that freshmen often struggle... and that being close...' uses parallel 'that' clauses for clarity. Note the correct use of the gerund 'being close' as the subject.

SPEAKING TIPS

In Task 2, do not give your own opinion. Your job is to summarize the speaker's opinion. The transition 'In the conversation' immediately signals this to the rater.

The reading announces that the campus cafeteria will switch to serving only organic food starting next semester. **In the conversation,** the woman expresses strong disagreement with this plan. **To begin with,** she argues that organic food is significantly more expensive, **which means** meal plan prices will have to rise. **She notes that** many students already struggle to afford their current meal plans. **Furthermore,** she points out that the cafeteria has not consulted students about this change, **even though** students are the primary customers. **Ultimately,** she believes the university should reconsider the decision.

VOCABULARY NOTES

Strong vocabulary: *significantly more expensive, primary customers, reconsider the decision.* Note the precise use of 'primary' instead of 'main.'

GRAMMAR NOTES

Two effective subordinate clauses: 'which means meal plan prices will have to rise' and 'even though students are the primary customers.' Both compress complex ideas efficiently.

SPEAKING TIPS

When summarizing disagreement, include the speaker's specific objections. Ratios of 2:1 (objections to agreement) typically score higher because they show you captured the nuance of the speaker's stance.

The reading passage defines the halo effect as a cognitive bias where our overall impression of a person influences how we judge their specific traits. **In the lecture,** the professor illustrates this concept with a personal example. **Specifically,** he describes a former colleague who was physically attractive and well-dressed. **As a result,** people automatically assumed he was also intelligent and hardworking, **even though** they had no evidence of these qualities. **Later on,** it became clear that he was actually quite disorganized and missed several important deadlines. **This example clearly demonstrates** how a single positive trait can bias our judgment of unrelated qualities.

VOCABULARY NOTES

Effective use of *cognitive bias, physically attractive and well-dressed, missed several important deadlines.* These phrases are precise and academic.

GRAMMAR NOTES

Note the subordinate clause 'even though they had no evidence' which efficiently compresses contrast. The phrase 'it became clear that' is a useful passive construction for describing discoveries.

SPEAKING TIPS

When explaining a psychological or scientific concept, always connect the example back to the definition. The transition 'This example clearly demonstrates' makes that connection explicit for the rater.

The reading explains the concept of audience design in communication, which is the practice of tailoring your message to your specific audience. **To illustrate,** the professor describes two different scenarios. **In the first example,** she talks about explaining her research to a group of fellow scientists. **In that case,** she uses technical vocabulary and complex data. **In contrast,** when she speaks to elementary school children about the same research, she uses simple analogies and interactive demonstrations. **This contrast clearly shows** how audience design requires speakers to fundamentally reshape their message **depending on** who is listening.

VOCABULARY NOTES

Useful academic vocabulary: *tailoring your message, technical vocabulary, interactive demonstrations, fundamentally reshape.*

GRAMMAR NOTES

Parallel structure: 'In the first example... In contrast...!' is a clean way to compare two scenarios. Note the gerund 'explaining' and 'speaking' used as objects of prepositions.

SPEAKING TIPS

Task 3 often has two contrasting examples. Use parallel structure to present them: 'In the first example... In contrast...!' makes the comparison instantly clear to the rater.

In this lecture, the professor discusses two ways that animals protect their young from predators. **First**, she describes the distraction display, where a parent bird pretends to be injured to draw predators away from the nest. **Specifically**, she mentions the killdeer, which flops on the ground and waves its broken wing to lure foxes away from its chicks. **Once** the predator is far enough from the nest, the bird simply flies away. **In addition**, the professor explains the concept of camouflage, where animals blend into their environment to avoid detection entirely. **For example**, ptarmigans change their feather color from brown in summer to white in winter, matching the snow. **Ultimately**, both strategies demonstrate how evolution has equipped animals with sophisticated mechanisms to ensure the survival of their offspring.

VOCABULARY NOTES

Strong vocabulary: *distraction display, lures foxes away, sophisticated mechanisms, offspring*. These are precise academic terms.

GRAMMAR NOTES

Effective use of relative clauses: 'where a parent bird pretends to be injured' and 'which flops on the ground.' These compress complex ideas into single sentences.

SPEAKING TIPS

Task 4 has no reading passage, so you have more flexibility in how you organize. Just make sure to mention both examples the professor gives. Missing one example costs you a full point on Topic Development.

The professor in this lecture explains how businesses use two different pricing strategies to attract customers. **To begin with**, she discusses the penetration pricing strategy, where a company sets a low initial price to quickly gain market share. **As an example**, she describes a streaming service that launched with a five-dollar monthly fee, well below competitors' prices. **As a result**, the service attracted millions of subscribers within its first year. **In contrast**, the professor then explains premium pricing, where companies set high prices to signal luxury and quality. **For instance**, she mentions a watch brand that charges thousands of dollars per watch, **even though** the manufacturing cost is relatively low. **In conclusion**, the professor shows that pricing is not just about cost but also about positioning.

VOCABULARY NOTES

Effective use of business terminology: *penetration pricing*, *market share*, *premium pricing*, *positioning*. These terms show you understood the academic content of the lecture.

GRAMMAR NOTES

Note the structure: 'To begin with... In contrast... In conclusion.' This three-part structure with clear transitions makes the response easy to follow.

SPEAKING TIPS

When the lecture presents two contrasting concepts, explicitly use contrast transitions like 'In contrast' or 'On the other hand.' This signals to the rater that you understood the structure of the lecture, not just the content.

| What These Model Answers Have in Common

Notice the patterns across all ten model answers. First, every response uses between six and nine transitions, distributed evenly across the response. Second, transitions are never stacked (you do not see "Furthermore, in addition, also..."). Third, each transition is followed by a substantial clause that actually develops the idea. Fourth, the responses do not use filler phrases like "I mean" or "you know." Fifth, the responses end with a clear concluding transition that signals closure.

Most importantly, the transitions feel natural. They are not inserted mechanically; they arise organically from the logic of the argument. This is the level you should aim for. When you practice, focus first on getting the transitions in the right places. Once that becomes automatic, focus on making them sound natural. The two goals are different, and you must achieve both to score in the Band 26 to 30 range.

★ SELF-RECORDING CHALLENGE

Choose three model answers from this chapter and record yourself reading each one out loud, paying close attention to the rhythm of the transitions. Then record yourself answering the same prompts without looking at the model. Compare the two recordings. The closer your second recording sounds to the first, the more natural your transition use has become.

CHAPTER 6

The Most Overused Transitional Words

Why Also, And, But, So, Because, and Then are holding you back

Six words dominate the speech of most intermediate English learners: also, and, but, so, because, and then. These are the first transitional words most students learn, and they are incredibly useful in casual conversation. But in a TOEFL Speaking response, overusing them signals to the rater that your discourse marker vocabulary is limited. This chapter explains why each word is overused, what its limitations are, and which alternatives you should practice.

! THE OVERUSE PROBLEM

If you record a 60-second response and find that you have used 'and' five times, 'so' three times, and 'because' twice, your language use is too repetitive. Even if your grammar and pronunciation are perfect, the rater will hear the repetition and lower your score. Variety in discourse markers is one of the clearest signals of advanced English.

1. "Also" - The Lazy Adder

"Also" is probably the most overused transition in TOEFL Speaking. It is short, easy to use, and grammatically forgiving. The problem is that it carries very little weight. When you say "also," you are signaling that you are adding a point, but you are not signaling how that point relates to the previous one. Is it stronger? Weaker? More specific? More general? "Also" tells the rater nothing about the relationship.

| Instead of | Use | When |
|------------|----------------|--|
| Also | In addition | Adding a parallel point of similar weight |
| Also | Furthermore | Adding a point that strengthens the argument |
| Also | Moreover | Adding a more formal supporting point |
| Also | On top of that | Adding emphasis, slightly informal |
| Also | What's more | Adding a surprising or especially strong point |
| Also | Besides that | Adding a secondary point |

2. "And" - The Universal Connector

"And" is technically a coordinating conjunction, not a transition, but it serves a transitional function in spoken English. The problem is that students use "and" to connect virtually any two ideas, regardless of their actual relationship. This flattens the structure of your argument and makes everything sound like a list. If two ideas are related by cause and effect, contrast, or example, use a transition that signals that specific relationship, not "and."

INSTEAD OF...

Instead of: *I like coffee, and it helps me stay awake, and I drink it every morning, and my friend also likes coffee.*

Use: *Not only do I like coffee, but it also helps me stay awake. In fact, I drink it every morning, just as my friend does.*

3. "But" - The Default Contrast

"But" is the most common contrast word in English, and it is perfectly fine to use. The problem is that students often use "but" when a more precise contrast word would communicate the relationship more clearly. "However" suggests a stronger contrast. "On the other hand" suggests weighing two options. "Nevertheless" suggests a concession. "Although" suggests a subordinate contrast. Each of these signals a slightly different logical relationship, and choosing the right one shows the rater that you understand nuance.

| Instead of | Use | When |
|------------|-------------------|--|
| But | However | General contrast, more formal |
| But | On the other hand | Weighing two sides of an issue |
| But | Nevertheless | Conceding a point but continuing |
| But | Whereas | Comparing two things directly |
| But | Although | Subordinate contrast within a sentence |
| But | Yet | Surprising contrast, slightly literary |

4. "So" - The Cause-Effect Default

"So" is the most common cause-effect transition in spoken English. It is informal and works fine in casual conversation. In TOEFL Speaking, however, "so" can make you sound unsophisticated if overused. Worse, "so" is often used as a filler at the start of sentences ("So, I think...") which adds no logical value and just fills space. Aim to replace at least half of your "so"s with more formal alternatives like "therefore," "as a result," or "consequently."

INSTEAD OF...

Instead of: *The traffic was bad, so I was late, so I missed the first part, so I had to ask my friend for notes.*

Use: *The traffic was terrible, and as a result, I arrived late. Consequently, I missed the first part of the lecture, which meant I had to ask my friend for the notes.*

5. "Because" - The Single Reason Marker

"Because" is the first cause word most students learn, and it is grammatically versatile. The problem is that students often over-rely on it, using "because" three or four times in a single response. Vary your cause markers: "since," "as," "due to," "owing to," "given that," "considering that." Each of these has a slightly different flavor and using them appropriately will signal to the rater that your vocabulary is broad.

| Instead of | Use | When |
|------------|------------------|--|
| Because | Since | When the reason is already known or accepted |
| Because | As | When the reason is brief and secondary |
| Because | Due to | When followed by a noun phrase |
| Because | Owing to | More formal version of "due to" |
| Because | Given that | When the reason is a fact you are assuming |
| Because | Considering that | When weighing factors in a decision |

6. "Then" - The Vague Sequencer

"Then" is the default sequencing word for most learners, but it is vague. It can mean "next in time," "next in logic," "in that case," or "as a consequence." This ambiguity can confuse the rater. If you mean time, use "after that" or "next." If you mean logic, use "therefore" or "in that case." If you mean consequence, use "as a result." Precision in sequencing words makes your argument easier to follow.

INSTEAD OF...

Instead of: *I woke up, then I ate breakfast, then I went to class, then I studied, then I went home.*

Use: *After I woke up, I ate breakfast. Next, I headed to class, followed by a study session. Eventually, I returned home.*

A 7-Day Replacement Challenge

To break your dependence on these six overused words, try this seven-day challenge. On day one, eliminate "also" entirely from your speech and replace it with "in addition" or "furthermore." On day two, eliminate "and" as a sentence opener. On day three, replace every "but" with a more precise contrast word. Continue this pattern through day seven. By the end of the week, your speech will be noticeably more varied and sophisticated.

✓ SCORE BOOSTER

Record yourself answering a TOEFL prompt before starting the 7-day challenge, and then again at the end. Compare the two recordings. You will be surprised how much more sophisticated your speech sounds when you stop overusing these six words.

Native Speaker Alternatives

Upgrade your vocabulary with sophisticated substitutes

One of the fastest ways to improve your TOEFL Speaking score is to replace common, simple words with the more sophisticated alternatives that native speakers use. This is not about showing off vocabulary. It is about precision. Native speakers choose "since" over "because" when the reason is already known, and they choose "due to" when they need a noun phrase rather than a full clause. These distinctions matter, and learning them will make your speech sound more natural.

Below you will find 15 sets of alternatives, each focused on a common word that intermediate speakers overuse. For each set, you will see the word being replaced, a list of native speaker alternatives, and an example showing how the substitution works in context. Practice these substitutions deliberately for two weeks, and they will become automatic.

1. Instead of "Because"

Native alternatives: *Since, As, Due to (the fact that), Considering that, Given that, Now that, On account of, Owing to the fact that*

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: Because I was tired, I left early. → Since I was tired, I left early.

2. Instead of "But"

Native alternatives: *However, Yet, Although, Even so, Still, Nevertheless, Nonetheless, On the other hand, Whereas, In contrast*

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: I tried, but I failed. → I tried; however, I failed.

3. Instead of "Also"

Native alternatives: *In addition, Additionally, Furthermore, Moreover, On top of that, What's more, Besides, Not to mention, Likewise*

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: Also, the price is fair. → Moreover, the price is quite reasonable.

4. Instead of "So"

Native alternatives: Therefore, Thus, Hence, As a result, Consequently, For this reason, Accordingly, That's why

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: So, I decided to leave. → Therefore, I decided to leave.

5. Instead of "And"

Native alternatives: As well as, Along with, In addition to, Coupled with, Together with, Plus

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: I bought books and pens. → I bought books, as well as pens.

6. Instead of "Then"

Native alternatives: After that, Next, Subsequently, Following that, Later on, Thereafter, Soon after

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: Then, we went home. → After that, we headed home.

7. Instead of "Like"

Native alternatives: Such as, For example, For instance, Including, Namely, To illustrate, As an example

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: I like fruits like apples. → I like fruits such as apples.

8. Instead of "Really"

Native alternatives: Truly, Genuinely, Indeed, Absolutely, Undeniably, Without a doubt, Unquestionably, Certainly

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: It's really important. → It is undeniably important.

9. Instead of "Very"

Native alternatives: Extremely, Highly, Exceptionally, Particularly, Remarkably, Notably, Especially, Significantly

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: It's very useful. → It is exceptionally useful.

10. Instead of "I think"

Native alternatives: I believe, In my view, From my perspective, I would argue, To my mind, As I see it, It seems to me, I'm of the opinion that

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: I think this works. → From my perspective, this works well.

11. Instead of "In conclusion"

Native alternatives: To sum up, In summary, All in all, On the whole, Ultimately, To conclude, In short, In a nutshell

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: In conclusion, practice matters. → Ultimately, practice is what matters most.

12. Instead of "First of all"

Native alternatives: To begin with, To start with, First and foremost, Let me start by saying, For a start, Initially, Above all

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: First of all, I'd like to say... → To begin with, I'd like to say...

13. Instead of "A lot of"

Native alternatives: Numerous, Countless, A wide variety of, A great deal of, Plenty of, An array of, A multitude of

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: There are a lot of reasons. → There are numerous reasons.

| 14. Instead of "Big"

Native alternatives: Substantial, Significant, Considerable, Notable, Major, Pronounced, Remarkable

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: A big change → A substantial change

| 15. Instead of "Important"

Native alternatives: Crucial, Essential, Vital, Critical, Indispensable, Paramount, Pivotal, Key

EXAMPLE SUBSTITUTION

Instead of: An important factor → A crucial factor

| How to Practice These Alternatives

Do not try to learn all 15 sets at once. Choose two or three that feel most useful for your speaking, and practice them for a full week. Write your chosen alternatives on a sticky note and put it on your bathroom mirror. Every morning, while brushing your teeth, say three sentences out loud using each alternative. By the end of the week, the new vocabulary will feel natural.

The goal is not to eliminate the original words entirely. "Because," "but," "also," and "so" are still useful transitions. The goal is to give yourself a choice, so that you can use the simple word when appropriate and the more sophisticated alternative when you want to sound more academic or precise. Native speakers use both, depending on context. You should too.

★ PRO TIP

When you replace a word, make sure the alternative is grammatically correct in the new context. 'Due to' requires a noun phrase, not a clause. 'Since' can refer to time as well as cause. 'Therefore' requires a semicolon or period before it. Understanding the grammar of each alternative is just as important as knowing the meaning.

! A WORD OF CAUTION

Do not replace every instance of a simple word with a sophisticated alternative. If your response is filled with 'furthermore,' 'consequently,' and 'in addition,' it will sound robotic and pretentious. The most natural-sounding speech uses a mix of simple and sophisticated transitions. Aim for variety, not maximum complexity.

Common Mistakes

44 mistakes to avoid, with corrections and explanations

Even students who know their transitions well can lose points by making small grammatical or usage errors. This chapter catalogs 44 of the most common mistakes that TOEFL Speaking raters encounter, along with the correct version, the reason for the mistake, and a better sentence that incorporates the fix. Review this chapter carefully, especially the week before your test, to make sure you are not making any of these errors in your own speech.

The mistakes below fall into four broad categories: redundant pairs (using two transitions that do the same job), incorrect prepositions, fragment errors (incomplete sentences after transitions), and inappropriate register (using informal transitions in formal contexts). Most of these mistakes come from overgeneralization: students learn a pattern in one context and apply it incorrectly in another. Once you understand the underlying rule, the mistakes are easy to fix.

| # | Incorrect | Correct | Reason | Better Sentence |
|----|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | Because of the rain, so I stayed home. | Because of the rain, I stayed home. | 'Because' and 'so' cannot both mark cause-effect in one sentence. | Because of the heavy rain, I stayed home all day. |
| 2 | Although it was late, but I kept studying. | Although it was late, I kept studying. | 'Although' and 'but' cannot appear together. | Although it was already late, I kept studying for the exam. |
| 3 | I like coffee, however my friend likes tea. | I like coffee; however, my friend likes tea. | 'However' is a conjunctive adverb; it needs a semicolon or period before it. | I like coffee; however, my friend prefers tea. |
| 4 | First of all, first of all, I think... | First of all, I think... | Repeating 'first of all' sounds unnatural and shows weak vocabulary. | First of all, I think we should consider the cost. |
| 5 | Due to I was tired, I went home early. | Because I was tired, I went home early. | 'Due to' must be followed by a noun phrase, not a full clause. | Because I was extremely tired, I went home early. |
| 6 | On the other hand is good. | On the other hand, it has some benefits. | 'On the other hand' must introduce a full clause, not stand alone. | On the other hand, it has some clear benefits. |
| 7 | In addition of that, we need more time. | In addition to that, we need more time. | The correct preposition is 'to', not 'of'. | In addition to that, we need more time to prepare. |
| 8 | For example, like, online learning... | For example, online learning offers great flexibility. | 'For example' and 'like' together are redundant. | For example, online learning offers great flexibility. |
| 9 | So that, I decided to apply. | Therefore, I decided to apply. | 'So that' expresses purpose, not result. | Therefore, I decided to apply to that university. |
| 10 | I think so, because the weather is nice. | I think so because the weather is nice. | No comma is needed before 'because' when it introduces essential information. | I think so because the weather is really pleasant today. |
| 11 | However, but I disagree. | However, I disagree. | 'However' and 'but' both show | |

| # | Incorrect | Correct | Reason | Better Sentence |
|----|---|---|--|--|
| 12 | In spite of he was tired, he finished. | In spite of being tired, he finished. | 'In spite of' is followed by a noun or gerund, not a clause. | In spite of being very tired, he finished the assignment. |
| 13 | Moreover, also, the cost is high. | Moreover, the cost is high. | Using two adders in a row is redundant. | Moreover, the cost of the program is quite high. |
| 14 | As a result of, the plan failed. | As a result, the plan failed. | 'As a result of' must be followed by a noun phrase. | As a result, the plan failed to attract enough students. |
| 15 | Even though, but I tried, I failed. | Even though I tried, I failed. | 'Even though' and 'but' cannot appear together. | Even though I tried my best, I unfortunately failed. |
| 16 | Firstable, I want to say... | First of all, I want to say... | 'Firstable' is not a word in English. | First of all, I want to say that I support this idea. |
| 17 | By the way, is a fact that... | By the way, it is a fact that... | 'By the way' needs a complete sentence after it. | By the way, it is a fact that practice improves fluency. |
| 18 | On contrary, I like it. | On the contrary, I like it. | The correct phrase is 'on the contrary' with 'the'! | On the contrary, I actually really like this approach. |
| 19 | I mean, like, you know, I think... | I think that... | Filler phrases reduce fluency and coherence. | I think that students should manage their time carefully. |
| 20 | In addition to study, I work part-time. | In addition to studying, I work part-time. | After 'in addition to', use the gerund form. | In addition to studying, I work part-time at a cafe. |
| 21 | Furthermore, the weather. So I stayed in. | Furthermore, the weather was bad, so I stayed in. | Fragments make your response incoherent. | Furthermore, the weather was terrible, so I stayed in all day. |
| 22 | I think so, because of I am tired. | I think so because I am tired. | 'Because of' is followed by a noun phrase, not a clause. | I think so because I am really tired today. |

| # | Incorrect | Correct | Reason | Better Sentence |
|----|---|---|---|--|
| 23 | Although, I like coffee, I drink tea. | Although I like coffee, I drink tea. | <i>No comma after 'although' unless it ends a dependent clause.</i> | Although I like coffee, I usually drink tea in the evening. |
| 24 | Therefore, so I decided to leave. | Therefore, I decided to leave. | <i>'Therefore' and 'so' together are redundant.</i> | Therefore, I decided to leave the meeting early. |
| 25 | Compared with last year, so sales grew. | Compared with last year, sales grew. | <i>Do not add 'so' after a comparison phrase.</i> | Compared with last year, sales have grown significantly. |
| 26 | Last but not least, is the importance of rest. | Last but not least, rest is essential. | <i>'Last but not least' must introduce a complete sentence.</i> | Last but not least, rest is essential for long-term success. |
| 27 | Such as, I like apples and oranges. | I like fruits such as apples and oranges. | <i>'Such as' should not start a sentence.</i> | I enjoy many fruits such as apples, oranges, and bananas. |
| 28 | Because I was busy. So I didn't go. | Because I was busy, I didn't go. | <i>Don't split cause and effect into separate sentences.</i> | Because I was very busy, I couldn't attend the event. |
| 29 | In conclusion, in short, the plan works. | In conclusion, the plan works. | <i>Two summary phrases together are redundant.</i> | In conclusion, the new plan will likely work well. |
| 30 | However, I think so. On the other hand, I'm not sure. | I think so; however, I'm not entirely sure. | <i>Stacking contrasts confuses the listener.</i> | I think so; however, I'm not entirely sure without more data. |
| 31 | I recommend you to study harder. | I recommend that you study harder. | <i>After 'recommend', use a 'that' clause, not 'to + object'.</i> | I recommend that you study a little harder each day. |
| 32 | The reason is because... | The reason is that... | <i>'Because' is redundant after 'the reason is'.</i> | The reason is that the schedule conflicts with my other class. |
| 33 | Despite of the rain, we went out. | Despite the rain, we went out. | <i>'Despite' is not followed by 'of'.</i> | Despite the heavy rain, we still went out for dinner. |

| # | Incorrect | Correct | Reason | Better Sentence |
|----|--|---|---|--|
| 34 | In other words, in another words, ... | In other words, ... | <i>'In another words' is grammatically incorrect.</i> | In other words, students need more hands-on practice. |
| 35 | Like I said it before, ... | As I said before, ... | <i>'Like' should be 'as' when introducing a clause.</i> | As I said before, time management is crucial. |
| 36 | After all of, we need to rest. | After all, we need to rest. | <i>'After all' is not followed by 'of'.</i> | After all, we all need time to rest and recharge. |
| 37 | Besides of that, ... | Besides that, ... | <i>'Besides' is not followed by 'of'.</i> | Besides that, the location is very convenient. |
| 38 | On the one hand, on the other hand, on the other hand... | On the one hand, X. On the other hand, Y. | <i>Use the contrast pair only once per argument.</i> | On the one hand, it saves time; on the other hand, it costs more. |
| 39 | I mean to say, like, well, it's hard. | Honestly, it's hard. | <i>Filler chains hurt your fluency score.</i> | Honestly, this topic is quite hard to answer quickly. |
| 40 | Firstable, secondable, lastable... | First, second, finally... | <i>These are not English words.</i> | First, we should review the syllabus. Second, we should plan ahead. Finally, we should practice daily. |
| 41 | In my personally opinion, ... | In my personal opinion, ... | <i>Use 'personal' (adjective), not 'personally'.</i> | In my personal opinion, this policy needs revision. |
| 42 | What's more, also, plus, ... | What's more, ... | <i>Stacking three adders is redundant and informal.</i> | What's more, the campus provides free tutoring services. |
| 43 | Because, since, as, due to, ... (in one sentence) | Pick one cause marker per sentence. | <i>Multiple cause markers create confusion.</i> | Because the schedule is tight, we need to prioritize tasks. |
| 44 | Although, but, however, ... (in one sentence) | Use only one contrast marker. | <i>Triple contrasts confuse the listener.</i> | Although the deadline is tight, we can still finish on time. |

| The Top 5 Most Damaging Mistakes

Of the 44 mistakes above, five are particularly damaging because they are immediately obvious to raters and they signal a fundamental misunderstanding of English grammar. If you make any of these five, your Language Use score will almost certainly be capped at 2.5 or below, regardless of how good the rest of your response is. Make sure you have eliminated all five before test day.

✘ 1. USING 'ALTHOUGH' AND 'BUT' TOGETHER

Incorrect: Although it was raining, but I went out.

Correct: Although it was raining, I went out.

Rule: 'Although' is a subordinating conjunction that already expresses contrast. 'But' is a coordinating conjunction that also expresses contrast. Using both is redundant.

✘ 2. USING 'BECAUSE' AND 'SO' TOGETHER

Incorrect: Because I was tired, so I went home.

Correct: Because I was tired, I went home.

Rule: Both 'because' and 'so' express cause-effect. One per sentence is enough.

✘ 3. 'DUE TO' FOLLOWED BY A FULL CLAUSE

Incorrect: Due to I was sick, I stayed home.

Correct: Because I was sick, I stayed home.

Rule: 'Due to' must be followed by a noun phrase ('due to my illness'), not a clause. For clauses, use 'because' or 'since.'

✘ 4. 'THE REASON IS BECAUSE'

Incorrect: The reason is because I was tired.

Correct: The reason is that I was tired.

Rule: 'Because' is a conjunction, not a noun. After 'the reason is,' you need a noun phrase or a 'that' clause.

✘ 5. 'FIRSTABLE' AND SIMILAR NON-WORDS

Incorrect: Firstable, I want to say...

Correct: First of all, I want to say...

Rule: 'Firstable,' 'secondable,' and 'lastable' are not English words. They appear to be mishearings of 'first of all.' Always use the full phrase.

| A Pre-Test Mistake Audit

In the week before your test, record yourself answering five practice questions. Then listen back and audit your responses specifically for the 44 mistakes in this chapter. Mark every mistake you find, and write the correct version in your notes. Most students discover that they are making

three to five of these mistakes regularly without realizing it. Once you identify your personal patterns, you can correct them in just a few days of focused practice.

★ FINAL WEEK STRATEGY

Three days before your test, do one final recording session focused exclusively on mistake avoidance. Do not try to use impressive vocabulary or complex transitions. Just focus on making zero mistakes from this chapter. A simple, mistake-free response will almost always outscore a complex, mistake-filled one.

CHAPTER 9

Daily Speaking Practice

7-Day, 14-Day, and 30-Day plans to build lasting fluency

Practice does not make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect. The plans below are designed to give you the maximum improvement in the minimum time, by combining three critical elements: spaced repetition of transitions, daily speaking output, and regular self-recording with critical review. Choose the plan that fits your timeline and commit to it fully. Half-finished practice is worse than no practice at all, because it builds the habit of inconsistency.

| The 7-Day Quick Improvement Plan

The 7-day plan is for students who have one week before their test and need to make rapid improvements. It focuses on the highest-impact activities: mastering your transition toolkit, recording yourself daily, and reviewing your recordings critically. If you complete this plan faithfully, you can expect to add 1 to 3 points to your Speaking score.

7-Day Intensive Plan

Day 1: Read Chapters 1-3 of this ebook. Build your personal transition toolkit by choosing 15-20 transitions from different categories. Write them on a single page and tape it to your wall.

Day 2: Answer 3 Task 1 prompts using only transitions from your toolkit. Record yourself. Listen back and circle every transition you used successfully. Note where you hesitated.

Day 3: Read Chapter 4 (Templates). Choose one template for each task. Answer 4 prompts (one of each task type) using your chosen templates and toolkit transitions. Record and review.

Day 4: Read Chapter 6 (Overused Words). Identify which overused words appear most in your recordings. Re-record Day 3's prompts while deliberately replacing those words.

Day 5: Read Chapter 8 (Common Mistakes). Audit your previous recordings for any of the 44 mistakes. Re-record any responses where you found mistakes.

Day 6: Answer 6 prompts (mix of all task types) under timed conditions. Do not pause or restart. This simulates test conditions.

Day 7: Take a full 4-task practice test. Score yourself using the rubric in Chapter 1. Identify your weakest task and plan further practice.

| The 14-Day Skill Building Plan

The 14-day plan is ideal for students with two weeks before their test. It expands on the 7-day plan by adding pronunciation work (Chapter 14), native speaker alternatives (Chapter 7), and more practice with the integrated tasks. Expect to add 2 to 4 points to your Speaking score with full commitment.

14-Day Skill Building Plan

Days 1-7: Follow the 7-Day Intensive Plan above. By the end of Day 7, you should have a working transition toolkit and a baseline practice test score.

Day 8: Read Chapter 7 (Native Speaker Alternatives). Choose 5 alternatives to incorporate into your speech. Practice using them in 3 responses.

Day 9: Read Chapter 14 (Pronunciation Tips). Focus on sentence stress and linking. Record yourself reading a paragraph from a newspaper, paying attention to natural rhythm.

Day 10: Shadowing practice. Listen to a 60-second clip of a native speaker (TED Talk, podcast). Pause every 15 seconds and repeat what they said, mimicking their intonation exactly.

Day 11: Answer 4 integrated task prompts (Tasks 2, 3, 4). Focus specifically on using transitions to organize the source material. Record and review.

Day 12: Mirror practice. Stand in front of a mirror and answer 4 prompts while maintaining eye contact with yourself. This builds confidence and reduces nervous habits.

Day 13: Take a full 4-task practice test. Compare your score to Day 7. Identify remaining weaknesses.

Day 14: Light review day. Re-read your transition toolkit, review Chapter 8 mistakes, and do one final Task 1 practice. Rest well for test day.

| The 30-Day Mastery Plan

The 30-day plan is for students who have a month or more before their test and want to make a substantial improvement (4 to 7 points). It includes everything from the shorter plans, plus extensive work on the cheat sheets, flashcards, expressions, and a full mock test every week. By the end of 30 days, your transition use should feel completely automatic.

30-Day Mastery Plan

Week 1 (Days 1-7): Follow the 7-Day Intensive Plan. Goal: Build your toolkit and establish the daily recording habit.

Week 2 (Days 8-14): Follow the 14-Day plan additions. Goal: Add native alternatives and pronunciation work to your toolkit.

Week 3 (Days 15-21): Read Chapter 11 (Cheat Sheets) daily. Cut out the Chapter 12 flashcards and review them morning and evening. Answer 3 prompts per day, focusing on using 3 new transitions each day. Take a full practice test on Day 21.

Week 4 (Days 22-30): Read Chapter 13 (Top 50 Expressions). Choose 10 expressions to add to your toolkit. Answer 4 prompts per day under timed conditions. Take full practice tests on Days 25, 27, and 30. Compare all your test scores to track progress.

| Daily Speaking Drills

Regardless of which plan you follow, certain drills should be part of your daily routine. These drills take only 10 to 15 minutes total and they compound over time. Do them every day, even on rest days, to maintain your fluency.

★ DRILL 1: THE 60-SECOND WARMUP

Every morning, before you start your day, answer one simple prompt: 'What is one thing I am looking forward to today, and why?' Speak for exactly 60 seconds. Use at least 3 transitions. This warms up your speaking muscles and reinforces your transition use.

★ DRILL 2: THE SHADOWING SPRINT

Find a 30-second clip of a native speaker (TED Talk, podcast, news). Listen once. Then play it back and speak along with the speaker, matching their rhythm, intonation, and pace exactly. Do this 3 times. This drill dramatically improves your pronunciation and natural rhythm.

★ DRILL 3: THE TRANSITION WALK

Walk for 5 minutes while speaking aloud. Choose a transition category from Chapter 3 (e.g., 'Contrasting') and use every transition in that category in a sentence about your day. The physical movement reduces self-consciousness and helps the words feel more natural.

| Mirror Practice and Self-Recording

Mirror practice and self-recording are the two most powerful tools for improving your speaking, but most students avoid them because they feel awkward. Get over the awkwardness. The students who improve fastest are the ones who record themselves daily and watch the recordings critically. Mirror practice builds confidence and helps you catch nervous habits like fidgeting, looking away, or filling pauses with "um."

When you record yourself, use your phone's voice recorder or a free app like Otter.ai. Position the phone at arm's length and speak naturally, as if you were in the actual test. After recording, listen back twice. The first time, listen for content and transitions. The second time, listen for delivery: pace, pronunciation, hesitations, and filler words. Take notes on what you hear and identify one specific thing to improve in your next recording.

! SELF-RECORDING CHECKLIST

Before recording: Set up the timer. Have your prompt ready. Take one deep breath.

During recording: Speak at a steady pace. Do not pause for more than 1 second. Use at least 5 transitions.

After recording: Listen twice. Take notes. Identify one strength and one weakness.

| Shadowing Exercises

Shadowing is a technique borrowed from interpretation training. You listen to a native speaker and speak along with them, matching their rhythm, intonation, and pace as closely as possible. The goal is not to understand the content but to internalize the sound of natural English. Even 5 minutes of shadowing per day will, over a few weeks, noticeably improve your pronunciation and fluency.

Good sources for shadowing include TED Talks (slow speakers like Sir Ken Robinson are ideal), NPR podcasts (clear American pronunciation), and BBC Learning English podcasts (British pronunciation). Choose a speaker whose voice you enjoy and whose pace is moderate. Avoid speakers with very strong regional accents, as these can confuse your pronunciation model.

✓ 30-DAY PROMISE

If you commit to the 30-Day Mastery Plan and complete every activity, including the daily drills and weekly mock tests, you will see measurable improvement in your Speaking score. Most students gain 3 to 5 points. The keys are consistency and honest self-evaluation. Do not skip the recording review, even when it is uncomfortable. That is where the real learning happens.

CHAPTER 10

Mini TOEFL Speaking Tests

12 practice questions with full model answers and teacher notes

Below are 12 practice questions covering all four TOEFL Speaking task types. For each question, you will find suggested transitions to use, useful vocabulary, a complete model answer, and teacher notes explaining why the model answer works. Use these as you would use real test questions: time yourself (15 seconds prep for Task 1, 30 seconds for

Tasks 2-3, 20 seconds for Task 4, then 45 or 60 seconds speaking), record your response, and compare it to the model answer.

! HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

Do not read the model answer before attempting the question yourself. That defeats the purpose. Attempt the question first, record your response, then compare. You will learn far more from comparing your answer to the model than from reading the model first.

| Task 1 Practice Questions

Practice Test 1: Task 1 - Technology in Education

Some people believe that technology has improved education, while others believe it has made students less focused. What is your opinion? Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

In my opinion, To begin with, For instance, In addition, Ultimately

USEFUL VOCABULARY

improved education, less focused, multimedia resources, distraction, multitasking, retention

MODEL ANSWER

In my opinion, technology has overall improved education, despite some legitimate concerns about distraction. To begin with, technology gives students access to vast amounts of information that previous generations could only dream of. For instance, a student today can watch lectures from top universities around the world for free. In addition, interactive tools like quizzes and educational games make learning more engaging, especially for younger students. Admittedly, technology can be a source of distraction, but ultimately, when used responsibly, its benefits far outweigh its drawbacks.

TEACHER NOTES

This response uses 6 transitions in 45 seconds, which is the sweet spot. The 'Admittedly' concession shows nuance and the 'ultimately' conclusion provides closure. Note how 'For instance' is followed by a specific, concrete example rather than another general claim.

Practice Test 2: Task 1 - Work-Life Balance

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? It is more important to have a job you enjoy than to have a job that pays well. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

I strongly agree that, First and foremost, For example, Furthermore, That said, For this reason

USEFUL VOCABULARY

job satisfaction, financial stability, mental health, burnout, passion, compromise

MODEL ANSWER

*I strongly agree that enjoying your job is more important than earning a high salary. **First and foremost**, we spend roughly a third of our lives at work, so enjoying that time is crucial for our mental health. **For example**, my uncle left a high-paying corporate job to become a teacher, and although he earns less, he is noticeably happier. **Furthermore**, people who enjoy their work tend to be more productive and creative, which often leads to financial success anyway. **That said**, financial stability matters, but **for this reason**, I believe passion should come first.*

TEACHER NOTES

The response uses 'That said' as a concession, which is a sophisticated move that shows the rater you can acknowledge counterarguments. The 'for this reason' conclusion ties back to the original opinion, providing structural closure.

Practice Test 3: Task 1 - Online vs. In-Person Learning

Some students prefer to take online courses. Others prefer to attend classes in person. Which do you prefer, and why?

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

While some prefer, I personally favor, The main reason is that, For instance, In addition, Ultimately

USEFUL VOCABULARY

flexibility, face-to-face interaction, discipline, isolation, convenience, hybrid model

MODEL ANSWER

*While some students prefer the convenience of online courses, I personally favor in-person classes. The main reason is that physical classrooms provide structured learning environments that help me stay focused. **For instance**, when I tried an online course last summer, I found myself easily distracted by social media and household chores. **In addition**, in-person classes allow for spontaneous discussions and immediate feedback from professors, which online forums cannot replicate. **Ultimately**, while online learning works for some, I learn best in a traditional classroom.*

TEACHER NOTES

The 'While X, I Y' structure immediately signals comparison. Note how 'ultimately' provides a balanced conclusion that acknowledges both perspectives while restating the personal preference.

Task 2 Practice Questions

Practice Test 4: Task 2 - Campus Parking Change

Reading: The university has announced that starting next semester, parking on campus will require a special permit that costs 200 per year. The university says this will reduce congestion and encourage students to use public transport. Two students discuss the change. The man disagrees strongly, arguing that public transportation is a significant burden for working students.

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

According to the reading, In the conversation, First, Specifically, In addition, For these reasons

USEFUL VOCABULARY

parking permit, congestion, public transportation, unreliable, financial burden, working students

MODEL ANSWER

According to the reading, the university plans to require a \$200 parking permit starting next semester to reduce congestion and encourage public transit. In the conversation, the man strongly disagrees with this policy. First, he argues that public transportation in the area is unreliable, often running 20 to 30 minutes late. Specifically, he mentions that the bus route to campus only runs twice an hour. In addition, he points out that \$200 is a significant burden for students who work part-time to pay for tuition. For these reasons, he believes the new policy is unfair.

TEACHER NOTES

Note the structure: reading summary in one sentence, then conversation summary with two main reasons. The 'Specifically' transition introduces a concrete detail from the listening, which raters reward because it shows you actually understood the content, not just the gist.

Reading: The library will close for renovations during the upcoming winter break. During this time, students can use the city public library, which the university will provide free bus passes to access.

Conversation: The woman agrees with the plan, noting that winter break is the least disruptive time and that the public library has more resources anyway.

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

The reading announces that, In the conversation, First, Specifically, Furthermore, Ultimately

USEFUL VOCABULARY

renovations, winter break, disruptive, public library, bus passes, resources

MODEL ANSWER

The reading announces that the campus library will close for renovations during winter break, with free bus passes provided to access the city public library. In the conversation, the woman agrees with the plan. First, she argues that winter break is the least disruptive time for renovations since most students are away. Specifically, she mentions that only a small number of students stay on campus during the break. Furthermore, she notes that the public library actually has more resources, including a larger collection of academic journals. Ultimately, she believes the temporary inconvenience is worth the long-term benefits.

TEACHER NOTES

This response efficiently summarizes both the reading and the conversation in 60 seconds. Note the use of 'Specifically' to introduce a detail from the listening, which demonstrates comprehension depth. The 'Ultimately' conclusion provides closure without adding new information.

Reading: The writing center will now require students to book appointments 48 hours in advance, rather than offering walk-in service. The center says this will reduce wait times and ensure each student gets adequate attention. **Conversation:** The man disagrees, saying that students often need help at the last minute and that the new policy will hurt students with unpredictable schedules.

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

According to the reading, In the conversation, To begin with, Specifically, In addition, For these reasons

USEFUL VOCABULARY

writing center, appointments, walk-in service, wait times, last minute, unpredictable schedules

MODEL ANSWER

According to the reading, the writing center will require appointments to be booked 48 hours in advance to reduce wait times and ensure quality service. In the conversation, the man disagrees with this change. To begin with, he argues that students often need writing help at the last minute, especially before major deadlines. Specifically, he mentions that he himself has used walk-in service the night before a paper was due. In addition, he points out that students with unpredictable schedules, like athletes or working students, may find it impossible to plan 48 hours ahead. For these reasons, he believes the new policy will hurt the students who need help most.

TEACHER NOTES

Note the parallel structure: two reasons, each followed by a specific example. This is the ideal Task 2 structure. The 'For these reasons' conclusion efficiently summarizes without adding new content.

Task 3 Practice Questions

Practice Test 7: Task 3 - Concept of Sunk Cost

Reading: The concept of sunk cost refers to money or effort that has already been spent and cannot be recovered. The rational decision is to ignore sunk costs when making future decisions, but people often fall into the trap of continuing a failing project because of past investment. **Lecture:** The professor illustrates this concept with a personal story about continuing to repair an old car that kept breaking down, simply because he had already spent thousands on previous repairs.

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

The reading passage defines, In the lecture, Specifically, As a result, This example clearly demonstrates

USEFUL VOCABULARY

sunk cost, rational decision, future decisions, failing project, past investment, repair

MODEL ANSWER

The reading passage defines the concept of sunk cost as money or effort that has already been spent and cannot be recovered. In the lecture, the professor illustrates this concept with a personal example about his old car. Specifically, he describes how he kept paying for expensive repairs even though the car kept breaking down. As a result, he ended up spending far more money than the car was worth. This example clearly demonstrates how the sunk cost fallacy leads people to make irrational decisions, as the professor continued investing in a failing car simply because of his past investment.

TEACHER NOTES

Note the structure: definition, example, connection back to definition. The 'This example clearly demonstrates' transition explicitly links the example to the concept, which is the most important move in Task 3. Without this connection, raters may dock points even if you described the example correctly.

Reading: Audience design is the practice of adapting your communication style to your specific audience. Effective communicators consider factors like the audience's age, expertise, and cultural background when choosing vocabulary, examples, and tone. **Lecture:** The professor gives two examples: explaining her climate research to fellow scientists using technical terms, and explaining the same research to elementary school children using simple analogies.

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

The reading passage explains, To illustrate, In the first example, In contrast, This contrast clearly shows

USEFUL VOCABULARY

audience design, communication style, expertise, technical terms, simple analogies, climate research

MODEL ANSWER

The reading passage explains audience design as the practice of adapting your communication style to your specific audience. To illustrate, the professor describes how she explains her climate research to two different audiences. In the first example, she presents to fellow scientists using technical terms and complex data. In contrast, when speaking to elementary school children, she uses simple analogies like comparing the atmosphere to a blanket around the Earth. This contrast clearly shows how audience design requires speakers to fundamentally reshape their message depending on who is listening.

TEACHER NOTES

When the lecture has two contrasting examples, use parallel transitions like 'In the first example... In contrast...!' to make the comparison explicit. This structure makes it easy for the rater to follow your summary.

Reading: Cognitive dissonance is the mental discomfort people feel when their actions contradict their beliefs. To reduce this discomfort, people often change either their beliefs or their actions.

Lecture: The professor describes his own experience of believing in environmentalism but driving an old, polluting car. He resolved the dissonance by buying an electric vehicle.

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

The reading passage defines, In the lecture, Specifically, This clearly demonstrates, In addition, Ultimately

USEFUL VOCABULARY

cognitive dissonance, mental discomfort, contradiction, beliefs, actions, electric vehicle

MODEL ANSWER

The reading passage defines cognitive dissonance as the mental discomfort that arises when our actions contradict our beliefs. In the lecture, the professor illustrates this concept with a personal example.

Specifically, he describes how he always believed in environmental conservation, yet he drove an old, polluting car. This clearly demonstrates cognitive dissonance because his actions directly contradicted his beliefs, causing him ongoing discomfort. In addition, he explains that he eventually resolved the dissonance by purchasing an electric vehicle, which aligned his actions with his beliefs. Ultimately, this example shows how cognitive dissonance can motivate positive behavioral change.

TEACHER NOTES

Note the use of 'In addition' to introduce a second part of the example (the resolution). This shows the rater you understood the full arc of the professor's story, not just the setup. The 'Ultimately' conclusion generalizes the lesson.

Task 4 Practice Questions

Practice Test 10: Task 4 - Animal Defense Mechanisms

Lecture: The professor discusses two defense mechanisms that animals use to avoid predators. The first is distraction display, where a parent bird pretends to be injured to draw predators away from its nest. The example is the killdeer bird, which flops on the ground waving a 'broken' wing. The second is thanatosis, or playing dead, where animals like the opossum fall over and emit a foul odor to make predators lose interest.

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

In this lecture, the professor discusses, First, Specifically, In addition, For example, Ultimately

USEFUL VOCABULARY

defense mechanisms, distraction display, playing dead, predators, killdeer, opossum, foul odor

MODEL ANSWER

In this lecture, the professor discusses two defense mechanisms that animals use to avoid predators. First, she describes distraction display, where a parent bird pretends to be injured to lure predators away from its nest. Specifically, she mentions the killdeer, which flops on the ground waving a 'broken' wing until the predator follows it away from the nest, at which point the bird simply flies off. In addition, the professor explains thanatosis, or playing dead, where animals fall over and remain motionless. For example, the opossum not only plays dead but also emits a foul odor that makes predators lose interest. Ultimately, both strategies demonstrate how evolution has equipped animals with sophisticated ways to avoid predation.

TEACHER NOTES

Task 4 has no reading passage, so you have more freedom in how you organize. This response uses a clear 'First... In addition...!' structure to present the two defense mechanisms. Note how each mechanism gets a specific example, which is essential for a high Topic Development score.

Lecture: The professor explains two marketing strategies that companies use. The first is penetration pricing, where a company sets a low initial price to gain market share quickly. The example is a streaming service that launched at \$5 per month and gained millions of subscribers. The second is premium pricing, where companies set high prices to signal luxury and quality. The example is a watch brand that charges thousands of dollars per watch despite low manufacturing costs.

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

The professor in this lecture explains, To begin with, As an example, As a result, In contrast, For instance, In conclusion

USEFUL VOCABULARY

marketing strategies, penetration pricing, market share, premium pricing, luxury, positioning

MODEL ANSWER

The professor in this lecture explains two marketing strategies that companies use to attract customers. To begin with, she discusses penetration pricing, where a company sets a low initial price to quickly gain market share. As an example, she describes a streaming service that launched with a five-dollar monthly fee, well below competitors' prices. As a result, the service attracted millions of subscribers within its first year. In contrast, the professor then explains premium pricing, where companies set high prices to signal luxury and quality. For instance, she mentions a watch brand that charges thousands of dollars per watch, even though the manufacturing cost is relatively low. In conclusion, the professor shows that pricing is not just about cost but also about brand positioning.

TEACHER NOTES

Note the parallel structure: each strategy gets an introduction, an example, and a result. The 'In contrast' transition clearly signals the shift from one strategy to the other. This parallel structure is the hallmark of a Band 26+ Task 4 response.

Lecture: The professor discusses two ways that plants adapt to survive in harsh environments. The first is drought tolerance, where plants in arid regions develop deep root systems to access underground water. The example is the mesquite tree, whose roots can extend over 100 feet deep. The second is fire resistance, where plants in fire-prone areas develop thick bark that protects them from flames. The example is the cork oak, whose bark is so thick that it can survive regular wildfires.

SUGGESTED TRANSITIONS

In this lecture, the professor discusses, First, Specifically, Furthermore, For example, In summary

USEFUL VOCABULARY

plant adaptations, drought tolerance, arid regions, deep root systems, fire resistance, thick bark

MODEL ANSWER

*In this lecture, the professor discusses two ways that plants adapt to survive in harsh environments. **First**, she describes drought tolerance, where plants in arid regions develop deep root systems to access underground water. **Specifically**, she mentions the mesquite tree, whose roots can extend over 100 feet deep, allowing it to survive in the desert. **Furthermore**, the professor explains fire resistance, where plants in fire-prone areas develop thick bark that protects them from flames. **For example**, she describes the cork oak, whose bark is so thick that the tree can survive regular wildfires with minimal damage. **In summary**, both adaptations demonstrate how plants have evolved sophisticated mechanisms to thrive in challenging environments.*

TEACHER NOTES

This response uses 'First... Furthermore...' instead of 'First... In addition...' to add variety. The structure is otherwise identical: two adaptations, each with a specific example. Note the 'In summary' conclusion that ties both examples back to the main theme of plant adaptation.

| Scoring Your Practice Responses

After you record your response to a practice question, compare it to the model answer using these four criteria. First, did you address all parts of the question? Second, did you use at least five different transitions correctly? Third, did you maintain a steady pace without long hesitations? Fourth, did you provide specific examples rather than vague generalizations? Score yourself from 0 to 4 on each criterion and calculate your average. An average of 3.5 or higher corresponds to a Band 26+.

★ THE 48-HOUR REVIEW

After recording a response, wait 48 hours before listening to it. You will hear your own speech more objectively after some time has passed. This simple delay makes your self-evaluation much more accurate and helps you catch mistakes you would otherwise miss.

Quick Review Cheat Sheets

One-page references for fast, color-coded review

The cheat sheets below condense the 100 transitions from Chapter 3 into quick-reference formats. Use them for fast review before practice sessions, for last-minute study the night before your test, and as a desk reference while you are practicing. Each cheat sheet covers one or two functional categories and lists the most useful transitions with brief reminders of when to use them.

● STARTING IDEAS

First of all

Starting a point

To begin with

Introducing the first point

To start with

Opening a topic

First and foremost

Highlighting the most important point

Let me start by saying

Personal introduction to a topic

● ADDING INFORMATION

In addition

Adding a new point

Furthermore

Adding stronger supporting information

Moreover

Adding weight to an argument

Additionally

Adding supporting detail

On top of that

Casually adding emphasis

● GIVING EXAMPLES

For example

Introducing a specific example

Such as

Listing examples within a sentence

To illustrate

Introducing a clarifying example

For instance

Providing one specific case

Namely

Specifying exactly what is meant

● EXPLAINING REASONS

The main reason is that

Stating the primary cause

Another reason is that

Adding a second reason

Primarily because

Highlighting the strongest reason

One important reason is

Introducing one key reason

This is because

Explaining why something is true

● SHOWING CAUSE

Because

Stating a direct cause

As

Introducing a cause briefly

Owing to

Formally attributing a cause

Since

Giving a reason already known

Due to

Identifying a cause (noun phrase)

● SHOWING EFFECT

Therefore

Stating a logical result

Consequently

Indicating an outcome

For this reason

Justifying a conclusion

As a result

Showing consequence

As a consequence

Formally stating an effect

● CONTRASTING

However

Introducing a contrast

On the other hand

Presenting an opposing view

In contrast

Highlighting a sharp difference

Nevertheless

Conceding a point but continuing

Whereas

Comparing two things directly

● COMPARING

Similarly

Showing likeness

Likewise

Adding a comparable point

In the same way

Drawing a parallel

Compared to

Direct comparison

By the same token

Drawing a logical parallel

● EXPRESSING OPINION

In my opinion

Stating personal view

I believe that

Asserting personal conviction

From my perspective

Framing a viewpoint

As far as I'm concerned

Stating a personal stance

To my mind

Offering a thoughtful opinion

● AGREEING

I agree that

Directly agreeing

Absolutely

Strong agreement

That's true

Acknowledging a valid point

Indeed

Reinforcing a statement

I share that view

Expressing alignment

● DISAGREEING

I'm afraid I disagree

Polite disagreement

I see it differently

Soft disagreement

Not necessarily

Gently rejecting a conclusion

On the contrary

Directly opposing

That said

Limiting or qualifying a point

● CLARIFYING

In other words

Restating for clarity

To put it another way

Rephrasing an idea

Specifically

Narrowing to a detail

That is to say

Specifying meaning

What I mean is

Clarifying intent

● SUMMARIZING

To sum up

Concluding briefly

Overall

General assessment

On the whole

General summary

In short

Brief restatement

All in all

Final evaluation

● CONCLUDING

In conclusion

Formal closing

Finally

Marking the last point

Ultimately

Final judgment

To conclude

Direct final statement

Last but not least

Final important point

● CHANGING TOPIC

By the way

Casual shift

Speaking of which

Connecting to a previous point

Moving on

Signaling a new topic

Incidentally

Adding a related side note

That reminds me

Triggering a memory

● GIVING CONDITIONS

If

Stating a condition

Provided that

Setting a strict condition

In case

Preparing for a possibility

Unless

Stating a negative condition

As long as

Setting a flexible condition

● EXPRESSING TIME

Meanwhile

Showing simultaneous action

Eventually

Showing a final outcome over time

Meanwhile, however

Showing simultaneous contrast

In the meantime

Indicating what happens while waiting

Subsequently

Showing what followed

● SEQUENCING

First

Marking the first step

Next

Moving to the next step

After that

Indicating subsequent action

Second

Marking the second step

Then

Showing sequence

● EMPHASIZING

In fact

Strengthening a claim

Indeed

Reinforcing truth

Without a doubt

Strong emphasis

Undoubtedly

Marking certainty

Above all

Highlighting the most important point

● MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

I would recommend

Suggesting an action

It is advisable to

Formal recommendation

I suggest that

Personal suggestion

You might want to

Soft suggestion

The best approach is to

Strong recommendation

| The Essential 20 - Minimum Toolkit

If you only have time to learn 20 transitions, learn these. They cover all the essential functions and are the most versatile transitions in the book. Memorize these 20 and you will have enough to structure any TOEFL Speaking response effectively.

ESSENTIAL 20 - MINIMUM TOOLKIT

First of all

Start a point

In addition

Add information

Furthermore

Add stronger info

For example

Give an example

For instance

Specific case

The main reason is

State a reason

Because

Direct cause

Due to

Cause (noun)

Therefore

Logical result

As a result

Consequence

However

Contrast

On the other hand

Weigh options

In contrast

Sharp difference

Similarly

Show likeness

In my opinion

Personal view

In other words

Clarify

To sum up

Summarize

In conclusion

Formal close

Ultimately

Final judgment

Specifically

Narrow to detail

Function-to-Transition Quick Map

When you are mid-response and need a transition but cannot remember the right one, use this map. Identify what you are trying to do (start, add, contrast, conclude, etc.) and pick any transition from that row. All of them are correct.

| If you want to... | Use any of these |
|-------------------------|---|
| Start a point | First of all, To begin with, First and foremost, Let me start by saying |
| Add information | In addition, Furthermore, Moreover, Additionally, On top of that |
| Give an example | For example, For instance, Such as, Namely, To illustrate |
| Explain a reason | The main reason is, One important reason is, Another reason is, This is because |
| Show cause | Because, Since, As, Due to, Owing to |
| Show effect | Therefore, As a result, Consequently, As a consequence, For this reason |
| Contrast | However, On the other hand, In contrast, Nevertheless, Whereas |
| Compare | Similarly, Likewise, In the same way, Compared to, By the same token |
| Express opinion | In my opinion, I believe that, From my perspective, As far as I'm concerned, To my mind |
| Clarify | In other words, That is to say, To put it another way, What I mean is, Specifically |
| Summarize | To sum up, In short, Overall, All in all, On the whole |
| Conclude | In conclusion, To conclude, Finally, Last but not least, Ultimately |
| Emphasize | In fact, Indeed, Without a doubt, Undoubtedly, Above all |
| Recommend | I would recommend, It is advisable to, I suggest that, You might want to, The best approach is to |

★ HOW TO USE CHEAT SHEETS

Print this chapter (or screenshot the cheat sheets) and keep them visible while you practice. After each practice response, check whether you used at least one transition from each row that applies. For example, every response should use at least one 'start' transition and one 'conclude' transition.

Printable Flashcards

Cut-out study cards for the 24 most essential transitions

Below are 24 printable flashcards, covering the most essential transitions from this ebook. Print this chapter, cut along the card borders, and use the cards for spaced repetition practice. Each card has the transition on the front and the function, example, alternative, and usage tip on the back. Review your flashcards daily for two weeks, and these 24 transitions will become automatic.

★ SPACED REPETITION METHOD

Review your flashcards using this schedule: Day 1 (all 24), Day 2 (all 24), Day 4 (all 24), Day 7 (all 24), Day 14 (only the ones you got wrong on Day 7), Day 30 (final review). This schedule leverages the spacing effect, which is the most efficient way to commit information to long-term memory.

CARD #01
First of all

FUNCTION

Starting a point

EXAMPLE

First of all, I think technology makes our lives easier.

ALTERNATIVE

To begin with

TIP

Do not repeat 'first of all' multiple times in one answer.

CARD #06
In addition

FUNCTION

Adding a new point

EXAMPLE

In addition, the new library has more study rooms.

ALTERNATIVE

Additionally

TIP

Do not pair with 'also' in the same sentence; it becomes redundant.

CARD #11
For example

FUNCTION

Introducing a specific example

EXAMPLE

For example, many universities now offer hybrid courses.

ALTERNATIVE

For instance

TIP

Always follow with an actual example, not another general statement.

CARD #16
The main reason is that

FUNCTION

Stating the primary cause

EXAMPLE

The main reason is that students learn at different speeds.

ALTERNATIVE

Primarily because

TIP

Make sure the following clause actually states a reason, not an effect.

CARD #21
Because

FUNCTION

Stating a direct cause

EXAMPLE

I chose this university because it has a strong engineering program.

ALTERNATIVE

Since

TIP

Do not start every sentence with 'because'; it sounds repetitive.

CARD #26
Therefore

FUNCTION

Stating a logical result

EXAMPLE

Therefore, students should plan their schedules carefully.

ALTERNATIVE

As a result

TIP

Use a comma after 'therefore' when it starts a sentence.

CARD #31
However

FUNCTION

Introducing a contrast

EXAMPLE

However, not all students benefit from online learning.

ALTERNATIVE

On the other hand

TIP

Avoid starting three sentences in a row with 'however'.

CARD #36
Similarly

FUNCTION

Showing likeness

EXAMPLE

Similarly, online shoppers value fast delivery.

ALTERNATIVE

Likewise

TIP

Use only when the previous point genuinely resembles the new one.

CARD #41
In my opinion

FUNCTION

Stating personal view

EXAMPLE

In my opinion, daily reading improves vocabulary more than any app.

ALTERNATIVE

I believe that

TIP

Do not overuse; once or twice per response is enough.

CARD #46
I agree that

FUNCTION

Directly agreeing

EXAMPLE

I agree that exercise improves mental focus.

ALTERNATIVE

I share the view that

TIP

Follow with a reason; do not stop at 'I agree' alone.

CARD #51
I'm afraid I disagree

FUNCTION

Polite disagreement

EXAMPLE

I'm afraid I disagree with that view.

ALTERNATIVE

I see it differently

TIP

Always follow with a reason; otherwise it sounds abrupt.

CARD #56
In other words

FUNCTION

Restating for clarity

EXAMPLE

In other words, students need consistent practice.

ALTERNATIVE

That is to say

TIP

Use only when actually rephrasing; not as a filler.

CARD #61
To sum up

FUNCTION

Concluding briefly

EXAMPLE

To sum up, technology brings both benefits and challenges.

ALTERNATIVE

In short

TIP

Use only at the end of a response, not in the middle.

CARD #66
In conclusion

FUNCTION

Formal closing

EXAMPLE

In conclusion, balanced learning is the best approach.

ALTERNATIVE

To conclude

TIP

Use only once, at the very end of the response.

CARD #71
By the way

FUNCTION

Casual shift

EXAMPLE

By the way, the deadline has been extended.

ALTERNATIVE

Incidentally

TIP

Too casual for academic responses; better in informal speech.

CARD #76
If

FUNCTION

Stating a condition

EXAMPLE

If students practice daily, their fluency improves quickly.

ALTERNATIVE

Provided that

TIP

Do not mix tenses inappropriately in conditional sentences.

CARD #81
Meanwhile

FUNCTION

Showing simultaneous action

EXAMPLE

Meanwhile, the teachers prepared new materials.

ALTERNATIVE

In the meantime

TIP

Use a comma after 'meanwhile' at the start of a sentence.

CARD #86
First

FUNCTION

Marking the first step

EXAMPLE

First, gather all the relevant information.

ALTERNATIVE

To begin with

TIP

Use only when listing steps; avoid for single points.

CARD #91

In fact

FUNCTION

Strengthening a claim

EXAMPLE

In fact, the results exceeded our expectations.

ALTERNATIVE

Actually

TIP

Use only to add weight, not to introduce new information.

CARD #96

I would recommend

FUNCTION

Suggesting an action

EXAMPLE

I would recommend starting with short practice sessions.

ALTERNATIVE

It is advisable to

TIP

Follow with a base verb, not 'to + verb' twice.

How to Study with Flashcards

Flashcards work best when you use them actively, not passively. Do not just flip the card and read the back. Instead, look at the front of the card, say aloud one sentence using that transition, then flip the card and check whether your sentence was correct. This active recall strengthens the memory far more than passive reading.

Another effective technique is to shuffle the deck and try to use three random transitions in a single practice response. For example, if you draw "However," "Furthermore," and "Ultimately," your challenge is to construct a coherent response that uses all three in a logical order. This drill forces you to think about how transitions work together, which is the key to natural-sounding speech.

✓ MEMORY TRICK

The best way to remember a transition is to associate it with a personal memory. When you study 'For instance,' think of a specific example from your own life. When you study 'However,' think of a situation where you had to change your mind. Personal associations make abstract words concrete and dramatically improve retention.

CHAPTER 13

Top 50 TOEFL Speaking Expressions

Beyond transitions - natural phrases for high-scoring speech

Transitional words are the backbone of coherent speech, but they are not the only phrases that make you sound natural. Native speakers also use dozens of conversational expressions that signal politeness, hedging, emphasis, and reflection. These expressions do not strictly connect ideas, but they make your speech sound more fluent and confident.

Below are 50 of the most useful expressions for TOEFL Speaking, with usage notes and examples.

Use these expressions sparingly. One or two per response is plenty. Their purpose is to add color and naturalness, not to fill space. If you use too many, your speech will sound overly casual or distracted. Choose three to five expressions that feel natural to you and practice using them in different contexts until they become automatic.

| # | Expression | Usage | Example |
|----|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | In my opinion | <i>Personal opinion</i> | In my opinion, daily reading is the best habit for language learners. |
| 2 | As far as I'm concerned | <i>Personal stance</i> | As far as I'm concerned, group projects build essential teamwork skills. |
| 3 | One important reason is | <i>Explaining a reason</i> | One important reason is that students need time to absorb new concepts. |
| 4 | To put it another way | <i>Clarifying</i> | To put it another way, learning is more like a marathon than a sprint. |
| 5 | What I mean is | <i>Clarifying intent</i> | What I mean is that practice must be focused, not random. |
| 6 | Without a doubt | <i>Strong emphasis</i> | Without a doubt, education opens doors to better opportunities. |
| 7 | Needless to say | <i>Stating the obvious</i> | Needless to say, attendance is critical for academic success. |
| 8 | As a result | <i>Showing effect</i> | As a result, the school revised its attendance policy. |
| 9 | For that reason | <i>Justifying a conclusion</i> | For that reason, I strongly support flexible scheduling. |
| 10 | After all | <i>Reminding of a basic truth</i> | After all, students are the ones who benefit most from these programs. |
| 11 | When it comes to | <i>Introducing a topic</i> | When it comes to learning vocabulary, consistency matters more than volume. |
| 12 | It goes without saying | <i>Stating the obvious formally</i> | It goes without saying that practice makes perfect. |
| 13 | I'd like to point out that | <i>Directing attention</i> | I'd like to point out that the deadline has been extended. |
| 14 | What's more | <i>Adding stronger info</i> | What's more, the course is offered free of charge. |
| 15 | Not to mention | <i>Adding extra point</i> | Not to mention, the campus has excellent sports facilities. |
| 16 | On top of that | <i>Adding extra info</i> | On top of that, students receive a certificate upon completion. |
| 17 | By and large | <i>General summary</i> | By and large, the new curriculum has been well received. |
| 18 | All things considered | <i>Final evaluation</i> | All things considered, the project was a success. |

| How to Incorporate These Expressions

The most natural way to use these expressions is at the start of a response or at a transition point. For example, "In my opinion" can open your response. "What's more" can bridge two supporting points. "At the end of the day" can introduce your conclusion. "If I'm not mistaken" can hedge a factual claim. The key is to use them where they fit naturally, not to force them in.

A useful drill is to choose three expressions at random and challenge yourself to use all three in a single 45-second practice response. This forces you to think about context and natural placement, which is exactly the skill you need for high-scoring TOEFL Speaking. After a week of this drill, you will have an intuitive sense of which expressions work where.

★ REGISTER AWARENESS

Some of these expressions are formal ('It goes without saying'), some are neutral ('In my opinion'), and some are casual ('Long story short'). Match the register to the task. Task 1 allows more casual expressions. Tasks 2-4, which summarize academic content, lean more formal. Mixing registers inappropriately can lower your Language Use score.

! AVOID OVERUSE

If you find yourself using more than three of these expressions in a single response, you are overusing them. The expressions should add color, not dominate. The bulk of your response should still be clear, direct statements of your ideas, connected by standard transitional words.

CHAPTER 14

Pronunciation Tips

Pauses, linking, stress, intonation, breathing, rhythm

Pronunciation is the foundation of your Delivery score. Even with perfect grammar and well-chosen transitions, if your pronunciation is hard to understand, your score will suffer. This chapter covers the six elements of pronunciation that most affect TOEFL Speaking: natural pauses, linking words, sentence stress, intonation, breathing, and rhythm. Master these six, and your speech will sound noticeably more natural and confident.

| 1. Natural Pauses

Pauses are not the enemy of fluency. They are essential to it. The problem is not pausing, but pausing in the wrong places. Native speakers pause at natural boundaries: between clauses,

between sentences, and after transitional phrases. Non-native speakers often pause mid-clause, mid-phrase, or even mid-word, which sounds choppy and uncertain.

The general rule is to pause where you would put a comma or period in writing. After "First of all," pause briefly. After "for example," pause briefly. At the end of a sentence, pause slightly longer. Avoid pausing in the middle of a clause, like "I think that [pause] the main reason is..." This makes you sound unsure. Instead, pause after the clause: "I think that the main reason is [pause]..."

PRACTICE THESE PAUSES

Good pausing: *'First of all [pause] I think technology makes our lives easier. [pause] For example [pause] smartphones let us communicate instantly with anyone in the world.'*

Bad pausing: *'First of all I think [pause] technology makes our [pause] lives easier for example [pause] smartphones let us communicate [pause] instantly.'*

2. Linking Words

English is a heavily linked language. Native speakers do not pronounce each word separately. They blend words together in predictable ways. The most common linking pattern is consonant-to-vowel linking: when a word ends in a consonant and the next word starts with a vowel, the consonant "links" to the vowel. For example, "an apple" sounds like "a-napple." "First of all" sounds like "firs-to-fall."

Linking is what makes English sound smooth and natural. Without it, your speech sounds choppy and unnatural, even if your individual word pronunciation is correct. Practice linking by reading paragraphs aloud slowly, deliberately blending consonants into following vowels. Over time, the linking will become automatic.

★ LINKING PRACTICE

Try saying these phrases with linking: 'an apple' → 'a-napple', 'first of all' → 'firs-tof-all', 'in addition' → 'i-naddition', 'on the other hand' → 'on-the-other-hand'. Repeat each phrase 10 times until the linking feels natural.

3. Sentence Stress

English is a stress-timed language, which means that the rhythm of speech comes from stressed syllables occurring at regular intervals. Content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) are stressed. Function words (articles, prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs) are unstressed. Mastering this rhythm is essential for natural-sounding speech.

When you stress a word, you make it longer, louder, and higher in pitch. When you unstress a word, you make it shorter, quieter, and lower in pitch. The contrast between stressed and

unstressed words is what gives English its characteristic rhythm. Many non-native speakers stress every word equally, which sounds robotic and unnatural to native ears.

SENTENCE STRESS IN ACTION

All words stressed equally (unnatural): 'I-THINK-THAT-TECH-NO-LO-GY-IS-IM-POR-TANT'

Natural stress: 'I **think** that **tech**nology is **impor**tant' (only content words are stressed)

4. Intonation

Intonation is the melody of speech: the rise and fall of pitch as you speak. English uses intonation to convey meaning beyond the literal words. Statements typically end with falling intonation, signaling certainty. Questions end with rising intonation, signaling uncertainty. Lists rise on each item except the last, which falls. Expressing surprise raises the overall pitch range.

For TOEFL Speaking, the most important intonation pattern is the falling statement. When you make a claim, end with falling intonation to signal confidence. When you list examples, use rising intonation on each item except the last. Avoid "uptalk" (rising intonation at the end of statements), which makes you sound unsure of your own ideas.

! AVOID UPTALK

Uptalk is the habit of ending statements with rising intonation, as if asking a question. It makes you sound unsure and undermines your credibility. Listen to your recordings: if your statements end with a rise in pitch, you are using uptalk. Practice ending statements with a clear fall in pitch.

5. Breathing

Proper breathing is the foundation of clear speech. Many non-native speakers breathe shallowly and rapidly when they speak, which makes their voice sound tense and uncertain. The ideal is deep, diaphragmatic breathing: breathing from the belly rather than the chest. This gives you more air support, which makes your voice sound stronger and more confident.

For TOEFL Speaking, the most important breathing technique is to breathe at natural transition points. After "First of all," take a quick breath. After "For example," take a quick breath. At the end of a sentence, take a longer breath. This not only gives you air support but also creates natural pauses that improve your delivery. Try to never speak for more than 8-10 seconds without taking a breath.

★ DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

Place your hand on your belly. When you breathe in, your belly should push out. When you breathe out, your belly should pull in. If your chest moves but your belly does not, you are breathing shallowly. Practice diaphragmatic breathing for 2 minutes before each practice session.

6. Rhythm

Rhythm is the overall flow of your speech: the combination of stress, linking, pausing, and intonation. A good rhythm sounds smooth and confident. A poor rhythm sounds choppy and uncertain. The best way to develop rhythm is to listen to and imitate native speakers, a technique known as shadowing.

Find a 30-second clip of a native speaker whose voice you enjoy. Listen to it once. Then play it back and speak along with the speaker, matching their rhythm, pace, and intonation exactly. Do this 5 times. Over a week of daily shadowing practice, you will notice your own speech becoming more rhythmic and natural.

✓ PRONUNCIATION SCORE BOOSTER

The single most effective pronunciation drill is daily shadowing. Just 5 minutes a day for 30 days will noticeably improve your rhythm, linking, and intonation. This is the highest-leverage practice you can do for your Delivery score.

Putting It All Together

These six elements (pauses, linking, stress, intonation, breathing, rhythm) work together. You cannot master one without the others. The good news is that improving one tends to improve the others. Better breathing gives you better rhythm. Better rhythm makes your stress more natural. Natural stress improves your intonation. The fastest way to improve all six simultaneously is daily shadowing practice combined with weekly self-recording and review.

Do not expect perfection in a week. Pronunciation improvement takes time. But if you commit to 30 days of daily practice, you will hear a noticeable difference in your own recordings. And more importantly, raters will hear a noticeable difference in your responses.

Final Review

Everything you have learned, in one place

You have reached the final chapter. Over the past 14 chapters, you have learned why transitions matter, how ETS scores your speaking, the 100 most useful transitional words and phrases organized by function, templates for every TOEFL Speaking task, model answers with annotations, common mistakes to avoid, native speaker alternatives, daily practice plans, mini tests with feedback, cheat sheets, flashcards, expressions, and pronunciation tips. This final chapter summarizes everything and gives you a clear path forward.

The 10 Key Takeaways

If you remember nothing else from this ebook, remember these ten principles. They are the foundation of high-scoring TOEFL Speaking.

★ 1. TRANSITIONS ARE GLUE

Transitions are the invisible glue that holds your ideas together. Without them, your speech sounds like a list of disconnected sentences. With them, your speech sounds like a coherent, well-organized argument.

★ 2. ETS SCORES FOUR CRITERIA

Delivery, Language Use, Topic Development, and Coherence. Transitions directly influence three of the four. This is why mastering transitions is the highest-leverage activity you can do for your Speaking score.

★ 3. AIM FOR 5-8 TRANSITIONS PER RESPONSE

Fewer than 5 sounds disorganized. More than 9 sounds mechanical. The sweet spot is 6-8 transitions, distributed evenly across the response.

★ 4. BUILD A PERSONAL TOOLKIT OF 15-20

Do not try to master all 100 transitions. Choose 15-20 that feel natural to you, from different categories, and use them consistently until they become automatic.

★ 5. VARIETY BEATS COMPLEXITY

A mix of simple and sophisticated transitions beats a response filled with only advanced ones. Native speakers use both. You should too.

★ 6. TEMPLATES ARE SCAFFOLDING, NOT SCRIPTS

Use templates to organize your thoughts under time pressure, but vary your wording so your responses do not sound mechanical. The structure matters; the exact phrasing does not.

★ 7. RECORD YOURSELF DAILY

Self-recording is the single most powerful practice tool. Listen back critically, identify your weaknesses, and target them in your next session. Students who record daily improve 2-3 times faster than those who do not.

★ 8. AVOID THE 44 COMMON MISTAKES

Many students lose points not from lack of vocabulary but from small grammatical errors with transitions. Review Chapter 8 carefully and eliminate these mistakes from your speech.

★ 9. PRONUNCIATION COMPOUND RETURNS

Daily shadowing practice for 30 days will noticeably improve your delivery. This is the highest-leverage pronunciation drill you can do.

★ 10. CONSISTENCY BEATS INTENSITY

15 minutes of daily practice for 30 days beats 8 hours of cramming the day before. Fluency is built through consistent, deliberate practice over time.

| Your Next 30 Days

If you have not already, commit to the 30-Day Mastery Plan from Chapter 9. The plan is designed to take you from where you are now to a Band 26+ score through daily, deliberate practice. The keys are consistency and honest self-evaluation. Do not skip the recording review, even when it is uncomfortable. That is where the real learning happens.

As you work through the plan, remember that improvement is not linear. You will have days when your recordings sound worse than the day before. This is normal. The trend over weeks matters, not the day-to-day fluctuations. Keep practicing, keep recording, keep reviewing, and the improvement will come.

| A Word of Encouragement

Scoring 26 or higher on TOEFL Speaking is not a matter of natural talent. It is a matter of deliberate practice. The students who reach this score are not necessarily smarter or more talented than those who do not. They are simply the ones who practiced consistently, recorded themselves honestly, and refused to give up when progress felt slow. If you commit to the work, you will reach the score.

Remember that fluency is a skill, not a gift. Skills can be built. Gifts cannot. The fact that fluency is a skill means that your future is in your own hands. The transitions in this ebook are tools. The practice plans are roadmaps. The model answers are benchmarks. The rest is up to you.

When you walk into the test center on test day, you will not be nervous. You will be prepared. You will sit down, put on the headset, and when the first prompt appears, you will take a breath, choose your first transition, and begin speaking with the confidence that comes from knowing you have done the work. That confidence, more than any individual transition or template, is what will carry you to a 26+.

✓ FINAL SCORE BOOSTER

On test day, before each speaking task, take one deep breath and silently remind yourself: 'I have practiced this. I know my transitions. I am ready.' This simple ritual will calm your nerves and center your focus, allowing your practice to translate into performance.

We at TypoGrammar believe in you. We have built this ebook to give you every tool you need to succeed. Now it is your turn to use them. Keep learning. Keep improving. Keep speaking with confidence. Your TOEFL Speaking success story starts today.

Visit us for more English learning resources:

<https://typogrammar.com>

APPENDIX A

Master Transition List (Alphabetical)

All 100 transitions in one quick-reference list

This appendix lists all 100 transitional words and phrases from Chapter 3 in alphabetical order, along with their category and function. Use this list as a quick reference when you

are looking for a specific transition or when you want to find all transitions in a particular category. The numbers in the first column correspond to the numbering in Chapter 3.

| # | Transition | Category | Function |
|----|--------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| 1 | Above all | Emphasizing | Highlighting the most important point |
| 2 | Absolutely | Agreeing | Strong agreement |
| 3 | Additionally | Adding Information | Adding supporting detail |
| 4 | After that | Sequencing | Indicating subsequent action |
| 5 | All in all | Summarizing | Final evaluation |
| 6 | Another reason is that | Explaining Reasons | Adding a second reason |
| 7 | As | Showing Cause | Introducing a cause briefly |
| 8 | As a consequence | Showing Effect | Formally stating an effect |
| 9 | As a result | Showing Effect | Showing consequence |
| 10 | As far as I'm concerned | Expressing Opinion | Stating a personal stance |
| 11 | As long as | Giving Conditions | Setting a flexible condition |
| 12 | Because | Showing Cause | Stating a direct cause |
| 13 | By the same token | Comparing | Drawing a logical parallel |
| 14 | By the way | Changing Topic | Casual shift |
| 15 | Compared to | Comparing | Direct comparison |
| 16 | Consequently | Showing Effect | Indicating an outcome |
| 17 | Due to | Showing Cause | Identifying a cause (noun phrase) |
| 18 | Eventually | Expressing Time | Showing a final outcome over time |
| 19 | Finally | Concluding | Marking the last point |
| 20 | First | Sequencing | Marking the first step |
| 21 | First and foremost | Starting Ideas | Highlighting the most important point |
| 22 | First of all | Starting Ideas | Starting a point |
| 23 | For example | Giving Examples | Introducing a specific example |
| 24 | For instance | Giving Examples | Providing one specific case |
| 25 | For this reason | Showing Effect | Justifying a conclusion |
| 26 | From my perspective | Expressing Opinion | Framing a viewpoint |
| 27 | Furthermore | Adding Information | Adding stronger supporting information |

★ HOW TO USE THIS LIST

Print this list and keep it visible while you practice. Highlight the transitions you have chosen for your personal toolkit. As you master each one, mark it with a checkmark. Over time, you will see your mastery grow visible on the page.

APPENDIX B

Transitions by Function

All 100 transitions grouped by their purpose

This appendix groups all 100 transitions by their functional category. Use it when you know what you want to do (start a point, contrast, conclude, etc.) but need to find the right word. Each category is color-coded to match the system used in Chapter 3.

● STARTING IDEAS

First of all - Starting a point

To begin with - Introducing the first point

To start with - Opening a topic

First and foremost - Highlighting the most important point

Let me start by saying - Personal introduction to a topic

● ADDING INFORMATION

In addition - Adding a new point

Furthermore - Adding stronger supporting information

Moreover - Adding weight to an argument

Additionally - Adding supporting detail

On top of that - Casually adding emphasis

● GIVING EXAMPLES

For example - Introducing a specific example

For instance - Providing one specific case

Such as - Listing examples within a sentence

Namely - Specifying exactly what is meant

To illustrate - Introducing a clarifying example

● EXPLAINING REASONS

The main reason is that - Stating the primary cause

One important reason is - Introducing one key reason

Another reason is that - Adding a second reason

This is because - Explaining why something is true

Primarily because - Highlighting the strongest reason

● SHOWING CAUSE

Because - Stating a direct cause

Since - Giving a reason already known

As - Introducing a cause briefly

Due to - Identifying a cause (noun phrase)

Owing to - Formally attributing a cause

● SHOWING EFFECT

Therefore - Stating a logical result

As a result - Showing consequence

Consequently - Indicating an outcome

As a consequence - Formally stating an effect

For this reason - Justifying a conclusion

● CONTRASTING

However - Introducing a contrast

On the other hand - Presenting an opposing view

In contrast - Highlighting a sharp difference

Nevertheless - Conceding a point but continuing

Whereas - Comparing two things directly