Natural discourse markers

01 Everyday answers

Work, study, home, hometown and getting around

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
01 **Start naturally** Answer the question directly. An opening phrase is optional.	**Well, ...**	**Well,** I'm studying nursing at the moment, and I work in a cafe at weekends.
	At the moment, ...	**At the moment,** I'm renting an apartment near the university.
	Generally, ...	**Generally,** I take the train to work because parking in the city is expensive.

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
02 **Add another point** Keep related ideas together.	**And ...**	My hometown is fairly small, and most places are within walking distance.
	Also, ...	I like my course because the classes are practical. **Also,** the teachers are really supportive.
	Plus, ...	Our apartment is close to the station. **Plus,** there's a supermarket just downstairs.

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
03 **Give an example** Make a general idea more specific.	**For example, ...**	There are lots of free things to do in my hometown. **For example,** you can walk along the river.
	For instance, ...	I use technology a lot at college. **For instance,** I record lectures so I can listen again later.
	... like ...	I enjoy outdoor activities, **like** cycling along the coast or playing football with friends.

TRY IT Describe your home. Give a direct answer, add one useful detail and include an example only if it helps.

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Natural discourse markers

02 Reasons, contrasts and choices

Explain what you mean without sounding like an essay

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
04 **Explain why or what happens** Because gives a reason; so gives a result.	**... because ...**	I usually take the bus **because** the stop is right outside my house.
	So, ...	My lectures start at eight, so I leave home quite early.
	That's why ...	Most of my relatives still live in my hometown. **That's why** I go back whenever I can.

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
05 **Show a contrast** Connect two different sides of an idea.	**But ...**	I like my apartment, but I'd love to have a small garden.
	... though.	The buses are quite reliable. They get crowded in the mornings, **though**.
	On the other hand, ...	Driving is convenient. **On the other hand,** taking the train means I don't have to find parking.

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
06 **Give a balanced answer** Allow for different situations or a small reservation.	**It depends, really.**	**It depends, really**. If I'm travelling into the city, I take the train. For shorter trips, I drive.
	I suppose ...	**I suppose** I'd prefer a house, mainly because I'd have more space.
	To be fair, ...	My hometown can be a bit quiet. **To be fair,** it's a lovely place to bring up children.

NOTICE THE MEANING Use 'on the other hand' for a second side of the same issue. 'To be fair' introduces a balancing point; it is not a general opening.

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Natural discourse markers

03 Tell a story and stay clear

Useful for longer answers about experiences and memories

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
07 **Put events in order** Help the listener follow what happened.	**To start with, ...**	**To start with,** I was nervous about my first day at work because I didn't know anyone.
	Then, ...	**Then,** one of my colleagues showed me around and introduced me to the team.
	In the end, ...	**In the end,** I really enjoyed the day, and I felt much more confident about the job.

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
08 **Correct or clarify** Make a brief repair, then carry on.	**Actually, ...**	I've lived in this apartment for three years. **Actually,** it'll be four years next month.
	I mean, ...	My hometown is lively. **I mean,** there's usually something happening in the town centre.
	What I mean is ...	My course is quite hands-on. **What I mean is**, we spend a lot of time practising in the lab.

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
09 **Return or shift focus** Use a clear connection; avoid unrelated tangents.	**Anyway, ...**	We stopped at a cafe on the way, and the food was great. **Anyway,** when we reached the beach, we went straight into the water.
	As I was saying, ...	**As I was saying,** the best part of that trip was spending time with my grandparents.
	As for ..., ...	The house itself is quite small. As for the neighbourhood, it's quiet and there are plenty of parks.

SMALL DIFFERENCES 'In the end' gives the final outcome. 'Actually' corrects or contrasts. Use 'anyway' gently to return to your point; it can sound dismissive if overused.

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Natural discourse markers

04 Develop an idea and finish

Opinions, wider discussion and a natural stopping point

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
10 **Give your view** State an opinion without making it sound absolute.	**I think ...**	**I think** cities should make buses more affordable so more people can use them.
	I'd say ...	**I'd say** the biggest change in my hometown is the amount of new housing.
	For me, ...	**For me,** the best thing about studying with other people is being able to share ideas.

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
11 **Take a brief moment** A short pause is fine. Do not use these in every answer.	**Let me think.**	**Let me think**. A teacher who really helped me was my secondary school English teacher.
	That's a good question.	**That's a good question**. I suppose people keep old photographs because they bring back memories.
	I've never really thought about that, but ...	**I've never really thought about that, but** I think a city's buildings can tell us a lot about its history.

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	NATURAL EXAMPLE
12 **Round off a longer answer** Stop when your point is complete; a closing phrase is optional.	**Overall, ...**	**Overall,** I think working from home is useful, as long as people still have chances to meet their colleagues.
	So, ...	**So,** that's why the trip to my grandparents' village is still one of my favourite memories.
	... really.	I like my neighbourhood because it's peaceful and close to work. Those are the main things for me, **really**.

SOUND LIKE YOURSELF Choose phrases that fit your meaning. Practise with your own experiences, not memorised scripts. Short answers do not need a formal conclusion.

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