

Discourse Markers

One of the most important aspects of writing good English is the ability to link clauses, sentences and paragraphs to each other by means of so-called "discourse markers". There exists a wide variety of words and phrases with precisely this function, a few of which are assembled below:

Suggested Exercises (39):

Here are discourse markers organised into groups. Choose the most appropriate one to fill in the gaps in the sentences below (sometimes several alternatives are possible):

1. Discourse Markers that Emphasise and/or Enumerate:

above all
and no one more (so) than
exactly
for one thing..., for another...
in particular
let alone
more importantly
more to the point
not least
not to mention
on the one hand..., on the other...
precisely
to say nothing of
what is more

1. I do not trust them. _____, they are lazy; _____, they are unreliable.
2. There is not one good road there, _____ a cycle path.
3. She is stupid, lazy and vain; _____, she is extremely malicious.
4. The country lacks a basic infrastructure, _____ a functioning economy.
5. He was a great thinker and scientist; _____ he was a true philanthropist.
6. Certain textbooks are in short supply; _____ French dictionaries are urgently needed.
7. Everyone was happy, _____ the bride and groom.
8. They may feel that they do not need to learn the grammar. But that is _____ what they are expected to do.
9. That factory should be closed down: _____, it is uneconomical; _____, it is polluting everything around.
10. These accusations are being taken very seriously, _____ by Signior Andreotti himself.
11. I don't want to see him again: he's got no manners and doesn't know how to dress properly. _____, my mother doesn't like him!
12. Your bicycle has got no brakes, no lights, _____ properly functioning gears.
13. The whole British political establishment has roundly condemned Serbia, _____ Mrs Thatcher.
14. He said he would not work against our interests, but that is _____ what he has done.

2. Discourse Markers that Express Certainty:

absolutely
altogether
beyond all/any doubt
beyond question
definitely
downright (*informal*)
indeed
nothing short of
unquestionably

1. _____ we have all benefited enormously from industrialisation.
2. Such behaviour is _____ dishonest.
3. John is a(n) _____ nicer person than his brother.
4. The standard of service has _____ improved since last year. (*Find an alternative to certainly.*)
5. The Serbs show no shame or compunction whatsoever: _____, they are proud of their actions.
6. _____ he is a great asset to our firm.
7. Charging them so much is _____ daylight robbery.
8. So you think she's slightly difficult at times, do you? I find her _____ impossible.

3. Discourse Markers that Express Doubt or Possibility

it is anyone's guess (*informal*)
it is quite likely that
it may well be that
it remains to be seen
presumably

1. They have promised to mend their ways and to try harder. _____ whether they will.
2. I was struck by the fact that the author submitted the manuscript without any footnotes. _____ they do not exist.
3. We have heard nothing from him for some years. _____ he was killed in the war.
4. His presidency has got off to a good start. _____ what the rest of it will be like.
5. John hasn't come back yet. _____ he has been forced to do overtime.

4. Discourse Markers that Introduce New Facts:

curiously enough, strangely enough
for that matter
for the record (*informal*)
in fact
in the event
it emerges that
it is a question of
it just so happens that
it transpires that
needless to say
...only to (be)
surprising as it may seem
that is/that's just the point
the fact is (that)
the thing is (that) (*informal*)

1. All that day they were waiting for the doctor to arrive. _____ he didn't come.

2. The plane crashed from a great height. _____ no one was hurt.
3. It is unclear how much the Irangate scandal will affect the position of ex-President Ronald Reagan or, _____, of ex-Vice-President George Bush.
4. For Far Eastern societies harmony is more important than Western-style democracy. _____, Asia is not equipped to swallow Western liberalism whole.
5. From the new evidence _____ he was innocent.
6. The Muscovites look with envy at the luxury goods in the shop-windows, out of reach of all but a lucky few — or, _____, of the average Western correspondent.
7. This is not a task to be embarked on lightly. _____ much preparation and planning.
8. Some people think that if I paid my employees more money I'd get better work out of them. But _____: no matter how much I pay them, they'll work badly.
9. Wilfred Owen survived years of war, _____ killed one week before the Armistice.
10. In that country things have not got better for fifty years — or, _____, even for five hundred years.
11. He asked her to lend him a thousand dollars. _____ he was unsuccessful.
12. I like chocolates: _____ I adore them.
13. The Institute for Research into UFOs has helped to enlighten hundreds of people. _____, and to dispel doubts about its existence, I would like to point out that it is now based in Somerville, New Jersey, and that it was visited by myself and my wife in 1990.
14. He sent the War Office details of his new invention, _____ see them locked away until the end of WW2.
15. Today's vandalism (and inner-city riots, _____) is the work of those of us who fail to tame their instincts.
16. Foreigners in France have good cause to worry. _____ new, discriminatory legislation is now before the French Parliament, and it has every chance of getting through.
17. Now that the files have been opened _____ she was working as a double agent.
18. To lead our department, we would need a person with very special qualifications. _____ we have such a candidate.
19. I don't like his parents much. _____ I don't like *him* very much either.

5. Discourse Markers that Express Correspondence:

any more than
correspondingly
either
for his (her, their) part
in the same vein
in turn
respectively
similarly
sure enough (*informal*)

1. He said he would be there and, _____, he was there.
2. Our MP is always accusing the unemployed of being lazy. _____ she recently made a speech in Parliament demanding that special labour camps be set up for them.
3. The workers did their task, and he _____ paid the wages punctually.
4. The children's behaviour was shocking, and the parents were _____ furious.
5. John works in London, Susan works in Brighton. J. and S. work in London and Brighton _____.
6. He's not going, and I'm not going _____.
7. We had better not mention the scandal involving the Vatican and the Banco Ambrosiano at all, _____ our clerical watchdogs do.

8. The vicar delivered a sharp attack on the Gay Rights activists. ——— he accused punks and hippies of promoting moral collapse.
9. In principle we are prepared to increase wages. But our employees, ———, will have to be more productive.
10. She said she would win and, ———, she did.
11. The Queen and Mr Major are the British head of state and prime minister ———.
12. My uncle is a racist and thinks that white people are superior to others; ——— he is always making fun of black people.
13. He did not care very much about his children, and they ——— had little time for him.

6. Discourse Markers that Express Conditionality:

conditional upon
if only
in any case
in case
in case of
in the event of
irrespective/regardless of
irrespective/regardless of whether
no matter how, regardless of how
no matter whether
provided (that)
providing (that)

1. We must go there, ——— we feel.
2. ——— fire, the number to dial is 997.
3. Don't blame yourself. It would have happened ———.
4. The same bonus will be given to everybody, ——— merit or seniority.
5. They must be evacuated, ——— they want to stay or not.
6. ——— my death, you will find my will deposited in the local Barclays Bank.
7. ——— you should lose your keys, I have left another set with the neighbours.
8. Whether we should have helped him or not, is simply an academic question. ———, he would not have succeeded.
9. The results will be published today, ——— they arrive in time. (*Find an alternative to if.*)
10. Promotion is ——— good performance.
11. We must be prepared to keep these people under close observation, ——— we have firm evidence or not.
12. ——— they can keep a close eye on inflation, the prospects for that country are none too bad.

7. Discourse Markers that Express Reference:

apropos (of) (*rather informal*)
as regards
as such
here
in connection with
in particular
in/with regard to
in respect of
in terms of
in this connection
in this regard
in this respect
on this point
on this score (*informal*)
talking about (*informal*)
with respect to
with special reference to
while on the subject of (*informal*)

1. ——— the environment the situation could hardly be worse. (= When one talks about...)
2. The film is well produced. ——— it is excellent.
3. ——— the Government, I think that the finance minister deserves special credit. (= While we are discussing...)
4. Some have questioned his ability. ———, however, we need have no doubts.
5. ——— the proposed casino I would like to point out that our town lacks tourist attractions.
6. This new Ford has many remarkable features. ——— I would like to point to the design....
7. ——— its general economic development the recent history of Zaire has been catastrophic.
8. I will be discussing Shakespeare's imagery. ——— *Othello*.
9. The two twins are different ——— personality and intelligence, but otherwise are indistinguishable.
10. There are too many mediocre politicians like Clinton. And ——— mediocrities, isn't it amazing that John Major hasn't resigned yet?
11. They have these problems because of bad management. ——— I am absolutely certain.
12. One mustn't regard the fall of the Roman Empire ——— moral decline but ——— social and cultural change. (*Find a better alternative to as.*)
13. The great question ——— the results is why so few people voted Labour.
14. He talked about Wellington's abilities as a general ——— the Peninsular War.

8. Miscellaneous

actually
all in all
as it is/was etc.
as such
by way of comparison
by contrast, by way of contrast
in theory... in practice...
let us suppose for the sake of argument that
namely
put simply
so much for (*somewhat informal*)
so to speak
still
strictly speaking
suffice it to say that
then
to the effect that
words to that effect

1. Ms Smith graduated from our department with a mark of distinction. In addition she has a formal teaching qualification. ——— she has every hope of becoming an excellent teacher. (= Since this is the case)
2. There is an old story ——— two lovers who fled by sea to France were blown off course and after many adventures shipwrecked at Madeira.
3. Unfortunately, the actual owner of the property, ——— the Duke of Mayfair, is unable to be present.
4. Korea has one of the most dynamic economies in the world. ———, it is becoming a serious rival of Japan.
5. ———, it is not a bad school.
6. Life's hard, and holding down a job is one of life's nastiest tricks. ———, having a job means that you have got to be there eight hours a day, five days a week, and with people who may not necessarily be your cup of tea.
7. The vicar was always giving tea-parties for his female parishioners. He was ——— a ladies' man.

8. She said that the school needed to be reorganised from top to bottom, or ———.
9. ——— the Queen is the head of the armed forces, but ——— her control is always exercised by means of her Government.
10. —1—— the Renaissance in Italy. —2—— let us turn to the Renaissance in France.
11. Her last will and testament was ——— her eldest son was to inherit all the property. (= essentially that.)
12. Vandalism is the outcome of social problems as much as it is a social problem in itself. ——— it has received special attention from sociologists.
13. Just look at what some pensioners are receiving — £30 per week! ——— they did not have to spend any of it on rent, heating, or rates. How on earth can anyone survive on so little?
14. She claims to be honest. Why, ———, has she not paid the money back?
15. ———, it's illegal, but this time I'll let you keep the extra bottle of whiskey.
16. By the year 1993 the country was badly in need of political stability. ———, the politicians had spent the previous years arguing about trivial matters.
17. Her remarks were ——— all her colleagues were incompetent.
18. Considerations of space preclude any more detailed discussion of the Sarmatians. ———, Herodotus' account of their customs is largely borne out by archeology.
19. It's no good making the situation worse: things are bad enough ———
20. He told her to shut up, or ———.

As with all the items in this book, discourse markers are not to be overused: while good English is impossible without them, it is a mistake to think that the more they appear in an essay or article, the better the language will be.