

Signposts to Structure

Academic Listening – Lecture Orientation

In a lecture, the speaker uses linguistic clues to show the listeners where she is going in her talk. Being able to recognize those cues is very important to academic listening. These tasks help you identify these clues, or SIGNPOSTS, to better pay attention in your lectures.

Task 1 - What is signposting language? Think of examples of signposting words and phrases. Why would these be useful in a lecture?

Task 2 - You will listen to a lecture on Sustainable Development by professor Dirk van Zyl of the University of British Columbia.

Pay careful attention to the signal language Prof. Zyl uses as he moves through his lecture. Take notes and organise them to reflect this structure. While you are watching, see if there are any other signal cues that the lecturer uses. In what other ways are you able to follow what the speaker is saying?

What is your overall impression of the speaker? Interesting? Boring?

Lecture 1 - Sustainable Development Concepts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8v4sZSDz484>

Task 3 - Read and discuss the following ideas on your own or with your ASK TUTOR -

While you listen to a lecture, try to focus on its structure. Sometimes the lecturer makes it clear at the start of the lecture with a list of headings or a summary. Note this down so you have a sense of where the lecture is going.

Typical phrases used at the start of a lecture include *"What I'd like to do today is..."*, *"OK everyone, today, we're going to look at..."* or *"I'm going to divide the lecture into three parts..."* These phrases help to set the scene and make sure that the students know what they are going to listen to.

The lecturer may use verbal signposts, for example: *"I shall now discuss..."* or *"My next point is..."* Other signposts to listen out for are phrases like: *"On the other hand..."* or *"Turning to..."*

In the main part of the lecture, the wording used will reflect the purpose it serves. If you wish to **provide additional information**, phrases such as *“Another example of this phenomenon is.....”*, or *“We can see this situation elsewhere”* may be used.

When **signalling a shift in the argument**, phrases such as *“Let’s turn our attention now to ...”* or *“What I’d like to do now is to move on to consider....”* may be useful.

Phrases that **emphasise a point** might include *“The main point I’d like to emphasise here is...”*, *“The key issue at stake here is...”*, or *“What I am essentially arguing is...”*.

Common phrases used to **draw the lecture to a close**, may include, *“Well, that more or less wraps things up for today”* or if the topic is not complete, a phrase such as *“Next week, I’d like to go on with this. I’ll be looking at....”* may be used.



Task 4

Below are the different **sections or function headings** of a lecture or presentation. In the table on the next page there are many examples of signpost language. Match the section or function heading with the signpost language in the table.

- a.) Finishing a section
- b.) Starting a new section
- c.) Analysing a point and giving recommendations
- d.) Giving examples
- e.) Referring to a later point
- f.) Introducing the topic
- g.) Overview (outline of presentation)
- h.) Paraphrasing and clarifying
- i.) Invitation to discuss / ask questions
- j.) Summarising and concluding

Section of presentation	Signpost language
	<p>The subject/topic of my talk is ... I'm going to talk about ... My topic today is...</p>
	<p>I'm going to divide this talk into four parts. Basically/ Briefly, I have three things to say. I'd like to begin/start by ... Let's begin/start by ... First of all, I'll... ... and then I'll go on to ... Finally/ Lastly ...</p>
	<p>That's all I have to say about... We've looked at...</p>
	<p>Moving on now to ... Turning to... Let's turn now to ... The next issue/topic/area I'd like to focus on ... Now we'll move on to... I'd like now to discuss... Let's look now at...</p>
	<p>Where does that lead us? Let's consider this in more detail... What does this mean for...? So that leads us to number of important points, the first... Why is this important?</p>
	<p>For example,... A good example of this is... To give you an example,... To illustrate this point...</p>
	<p>To sum up ... To summarise... Let's summarise briefly what we've looked at... If I can just sum up the main points... In conclusion ... So, to remind you of what I've covered in this talk ...</p>

	I'd like now to recap...
	Simply put... In other words..... So what I'm saying is.... To put it another way....
	I'm happy to answer any queries/ questions. Does anyone have any questions or comments? Please feel free to ask questions. Would you like to ask any questions?
	I'll come back to that later on... We'll discuss that in a later section... We'll return to this (a little) later... More on that later....

Task 5 - Below are some additional signpost words and phrases. Which section in the table does each belong to?

My talk is concerned with...

There are a number of points I'd like to make.

So much for...

I'd like to expand/elaborate on ...

The significance of this is...

As an illustration...

Unfortunately, I seem to have run out of time, so I'll conclude very briefly by saying that

To put it more simply....

If you would like me to elaborate on any point, please ask.

Then we'll get into...

Task 6 – Think of any other ways that lecturers signal their intentions or 'moves' to the audience? Share your ideas with your ASK Tutor and make notes below.



Task 7 – watch the video by professor Dirk van Zyl again. Which examples of signal language can you identify? How does his use of signal language make following his talk easier?

Sources:

Flowerdew J and Miller L 2005 'A pedagogical model for second language listening' in *Second language listening: theory and practice*, Cambridge U P, New York.