Notes on connectives (transitionals)

The following are issues that non-native writers of English (especially East Asians) have with English connectives.

1. Sequence, repetition, reformulation, and emphasis markers.

Indeed [1], clause-initial
In clause-initial (sentence-initial) position, *indeed* is used to confirm and amplify a previous statement with additional information.

   The forecast indicated a chance of heavy rains. And indeed, it rained hard enough to flood all the wheat fields.

Indeed [2], inside clause
Used to emphasize a word that it occurs next to.

   Indeed, it did rain as hard as predicted.
   The president is indeed an idiot. / The president is indeed stupid.
   He indeed wrecked the economy.

Also, interrogatively, to obtain confirmation – very formal or British.

   Did you indeed finish the assignment? (very formal)

In fact, as a matter of fact
These provide additional information to support or clarify as well as to amplify a previous statement; as a *matter of fact*, being more wordy, can be somewhat more informal. (clause initial)

   He is known by some to have questionable intentions in running for seeking the position. In fact, he once confided to a coworker that he wanted the position mainly to enhance his social status.

Actually
This is more common in informal English than in formal English. Clause internally, it adds emphasis (“He actually ate a bug!”), while clause initially, it acts like a sentence adverb to emphasize the point of the whole clause, often with a contrastive sense: “Actually, I’d like to go to Rome instead.”

Furthermore
This is used to add a further convincing fact or supporting information to convince the reader of a specific, preceding claim. This is a more formal equivalent of the more colloquial term *besides*. In contrast, *in addition* to merely adds additional information or detail, without the argumentative or persuasive force of *moreover* or *furthermore*. (clause initial)
The campaign is getting nastier, and the candidates are using more aggressive language. Furthermore, their respective party campaign machines are posting unsubstantiated rumors about their opponents on their web sites.

**Moreover**

This is used to add a further convincing fact or supporting information to convince the reader of a specific, preceding claim, particularly to add a final persuasive or illustrative detail. It is not used to reformulate a previous idea or to simply emphasize a previous idea, unless it introduces new, supporting information. It occurs clause-initially. This is considered very formal or older in style, and is less commonly used today, even in formal and academic writing.

The campaign is getting nastier, and the candidates are using more aggressive language. Moreover, some voters are being turned off by things said by supporters of the governor.

**Besides**

A colloquial or informal equivalent of in addition to, furthermore; not common in formal or academic writing. (clause initial)

We can’t afford to go to Hawaii. Besides, do you know how high the daily expenses would be once we got there?

**Especially**

This is an emphatic marker, usually emphasizing a content word in a sentence.

That was an especially foolish idea.

They especially want to travel Europe.

It can occur at the beginning of a clause or sentence; however, this gives it a sentence adverb meaning, in addition to its emphatic meaning, thus emphasizing the content of the whole clause. This is used in informal writing or colloquial English, and rather in academic writing. The emphasis on the whole clause breaks the smooth flow of sentences in academic writing style. Instead, it can be replaced with ‘in particular / particularly’, or ‘especially’ can be moved into the clause before a content word to modify the content word, or it can be omitted altogether.

Especially they want to apply for a graduate program in Montreal.

In particular, they want to apply for a graduate program in Montreal.

They especially want to apply for a graduate program in Montreal.

**In terms of**

With regard to; concerning; as measured or indicated by, on the basis of; in relation to, in reference to, as in. This usage originated in mathematics in the mid-1700’s, referring to numerical units. Be careful not to overuse it; some overuse it, leading to an artificial sounding or “officialese” tone.

How far is it in terms of parsecs?

The book offers nothing in terms of a satisfactory conclusion

This film offers nothing in terms of satisfactory entertainment.

**In (the) case of**

This is less common in writing or spoken English than in Korean. It is more typical of very official style or “officialese”, as in public notices and signs (“In case of fire, pull this lever”). Korean ESL writers tend to over-use it for topic shifts, for hypothetical examples, or to emphasize the topic /
subject of a sentence. Instead, use ‘if’ for a conditionals or hypothetical examples, or simply omit it altogether and start a sentence with an appropriate prepositional phrase (indicating context, situation, etc.) or a full noun phrase.

… In [the] case of U.S. economy, leading indicators point to a recession in the near future.
→ If one considers the U.S. economy, one can see that leading indicators point to a recession in the near future.
→ In / Within / For the U.S. economy, leading indicators point to a recession in the near future.

Then

‘Then’ at the beginning of a sentence is not usually followed by a comma

… Then, one should consider the implications of this approach.
→ Then one should consider the implications of this approach.

First, second, ...

Korean ESL writers tend to overuse these order markers (first, second, third...), due to how they were taught English writing, especially for essays on standardized exams. However, in academic writing, we use these less often, mainly when it is important to itemize a set of concepts, whose order would not otherwise be clear from the context. Also, one should distinguish between the different styles: firstly, second(ly), etc. are British; first, second, etc. are more American or general English, and first of all is more colloquial.

Etc., and so on....

Some ESL students (and native writers) tend to overuse these as stylistic “fillers” - etc., and so on, and so forth. However, they are not used simply as fillers in academic writing, but only when necessary. Also, if one begins a list with such as, e.g., for example, then an etc. or and so on at the end is rather redundant, and should not be used.

Latin abbreviations

In academic writing, the following Latin abbreviations are commonly used:

  e.g. for example
  i.e. that is, in other words
  cf. compare; compared to

The abbreviations i.e. and e.g. are preceded and followed by a comma within a clause.

Astronomers are currently hunting for extra-solar earth-class planets, i.e., planets outside our solar system capable of supporting life. Such planets would be marked by earth-like astronomical characteristics favorable to life, e.g., a mass not more than a few times larger or smaller than earth, and an orbit within at least a couple of astronomical units (AUs) of its star, but not more a few AUs.
2. Contrast
Contrastives like ‘but’ are known as concessives - for example, in a phrase like ‘X but Y’ the ‘but’ partially concedes the potential of X, or the expectations or implications that follow from X in the reader’s mind, but then provide a contrasting statement to X.

But
This is a default, general-use contrast marker, but overusing it in writing can sound colloquial, so using a variety of contrast markers is better for formal writing. ‘But’ is not used with a following comma, except for emphasis - and this is rare in academic writing, and more typical of informal writing or conversational style. In formal writing, instead of ‘but’-comma for a stronger contrast, you can use ‘however’ instead; otherwise, use ‘but’ without a comma. (In fact, Koreans ESL writers overuse ‘but’ and ‘but’-comma.)

Because ‘but’ conjoins two main clauses, or links two separate sentences, it gives equal weight or importance to both clauses (unlike the subordinating conjunctions below) - or as some linguists would say, it “foregrounds” both clauses - putting both in the foreground of the reader’s attention, with a movement from one to another related “foreground” or equally important set of content or information.

However
This indicates a stronger contrast than ‘but’, and likewise, foregrounds both clauses (perhaps it foregrounds the second clause following ‘however’, since it seems to present a stronger contrast of ideas). It is followed by a comma, and if it connects two clauses in one sentence, it is preceded by a semi-colon.

He planned to get a lot of work done that day; however, he woke up to find his computer missing.

For stylistic variation, it is possible to put ‘however’ after the first word of a clause for a smoother or more vivid flow:

He planned on a fruitful day of on-line trading; he did not, however, anticipate the stock market crashing that day.

Although, though
These subordinate one clause, and thus background the clause as information that is secondary to, leading up to, or supporting the contents of the main clause. This presents a different flow of information than with two main clauses or sentences.

Although he woke up early to go to work, he forgot that it was Sunday. cf.
He woke up early to go to work, but he forgot that it was Sunday.

Although was created centuries ago as a more emphatic form of though (all+though); today this difference is probably more subtle, but although is still slightly more emphatic. The connective even though is not equivalent to though or to even if (see below under conditionals).

---

1 These connectives generally indicate what linguists call a “denial of expectation” - the ‘but’-phrase partially denies whatever expectations that the previous clause might imply, i.e., it limits, mitigates, or negates implications of the previous phrase.
**While**

The contrastive use of ‘while’ derives from its use as a temporal marker (for time phrases, a conjunction equivalent to ‘during’ or ‘when’). This juxtaposes two contrasting situations or conditions, with a subordinate information flow, that is, it backgrounds the information in the ‘while’-clause to the content of the main clause.

While the candidate says she would release her medical records, she still has not.

**Whereas**

This is like ‘while’, but with a stronger emphasis, and like ‘however’, it foregrounds both clauses or sentences.

One candidate claims to be a champion of the working class, whereas the other claims that his focus on business and profits will benefit the middle class.

**Yet**

This comes from the temporal adverb (as in *not yet*, used as a negative equivalent of *still*: “Is he still running? He hasn’t quit yet”). As a conjunction, it is equivalent to *though, still, nevertheless*. As a coordinating conjunction with a main clause, it foregrounds the content of the main clause, so it is perhaps more like *still*. It is preceded by a comma or semi-colon, and is not usually followed by a comma (*yet*), except for special emphasis or colloquial style.

The work has been effective, yet it could be improved.
**Conditionals**

**Unless**
This is not equivalent to ‘if ...not’, but is more like ‘except if’ in meaning.

We couldn’t have made it safely unless you had helped us.

**Whether**
In academic writing, it is considered redundant to say “whether ... or not” - simply “whether” will suffice; “whether or not” is more colloquial style.

We cannot say whether the situation will improve.

**Even if cf. even though**
The adverb even functions to emphasize what it modifies in contrast to other possibilities. E.g.,

- Fire ants attack anything in their path, even large animals.
- Scientists warn that many species could die out, and the rise in global temperatures even threatens mammals.

In these sentences, *even* emphasizes the addition of the noun ('large animals'), verb ('threatens'), or other words that they modify; i.e., the modified term is emphasized as something (perhaps surprisingly) in addition to other things. Thus, in connectives like *even if* and *even though*, the *even* emphasizes information in the clause (in addition or in contrast to something else); *even if* emphasizes or contrasts the hypothetical possibility of what follows in the clause (counterfactual, or contrary to fact), while *even though* emphasizes or contrasts the clause as factual.

Even if you wanted to take the course, there’s no way you could handle such a hard course. [counterfactual]

Even though you’re taking this course, you won’t really understand the lectures if you haven’t had the prerequisite courses beforehand. [factual]