

## Signposts

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[Signposts](#) (or indicators), are key words that alert the audience to a change in topic, a tangential explanation, an example, or a conclusion. Readers and listeners can sometimes be lulled into “losing their place”—forgetting what point is being made or how far along in the discussion the writer or speaker has gotten. You can help your audience avoid this confusion by signaling to them when a change is coming.

Common signposts include “on the one hand,” “on the other hand,” “the solution to this problem is,” “the reason for this is,” “for example,” “to illustrate,” and “in conclusion” or “in summary.”

## Internal Summaries and Foreshadowing

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Like signposts, internal summaries and foreshadowing help the audience to keep track of where they are in the message. These strategies work by reviewing what has been covered and by highlighting what is coming next.

As a simple example, suppose you are writing or presenting information on how to assemble a home emergency preparedness kit. If you begin by stating that there are four main items needed for the kit, you are foreshadowing your message and helping your audience to watch or listen for four items. As you cover each of the items, you can say, “The first item,” “The second item,” “Now we’ve got X and Y in our kit; what else do we need? Our third item is,” and so forth. These internal summaries help your audience keep track of progress as your message continues.

The home emergency kit example also demonstrates the importance of repetition in foreshadowing and signposting. Specifically, repeating the number sequence and the word “item” helps the reader identify significant pieces of information, as well as the transitions between them. Beginning with the internal summary that four items are needed for the kit, strategic repetition also conveys the writer’s rationale for the structure of their document.

As effective as repetition can be, however, be careful not to overdo it. If you were to use the word “item” near the beginning of every sentence, for example, the reader would no longer be able to use that word to identify transitions between major points.

Ultimately, these practices help you reinforce relationships between points, examples, and ideas in your message. This can be an effective strategy to encourage selective retention of your content.

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