95 Linking words for stories and instructions

'Well, you see officer, **first** a rabbit ran across the road and I stopped quickly.

Then the car behind me stopped and almost hit me, but **after that**, another car came up really fast and hit the car behind me.

That hit my car and pushed it into the tree.

Then another car came up too fast and another, and **in the end**, there were six cars there!'

1 Describing events in the past

When we describe the order of events in the past, we use the linking words *first, then, after that* and *in the end*.

- We use *first* for the first event:
  ***First** a rabbit ran across the road ...*
- We use *then* and *after that* for more events. We usually use *then* before *after that*:
  *... **then** the car behind me stopped ... **after that**, another car ...*
- We use *in the end* for the last event of many, or to mean after a long time:
  ***In the end**, there were six cars there. **In the end**, we got our luggage back from the airline.*

In writing we often use *after* + *-ing* and *before* + *-ing* to describe the order of events.

Compare:
*I went to bed **after I locked** the back door.*
*→ Mycroft went to bed **after locking** the back door.*

*I decided to travel **before I went** to university.*
*→ Many school leavers travel **before going** to university.*

⚠ Don't use the infinitive *to* after *before* and *after*:
✗ ~~*Always check the oil in your car before to drive a long way.*~~
✓ *Always check the oil in your car **before driving** a long way.*

before and *after* ➤ Unit 94.1

NATURAL ENGLISH Don't use too many linking words together because it can sound unnatural:
✗ *First I got up, then I had a shower. After that I had breakfast and then I went to get the bus ...*
✓ ***First** I got up and had a shower. **Then** I had breakfast and went to get the bus ...*

2 Giving instructions

We often use the linking words *first, next, then, finally* to give instructions:
***First**, take six eggs, ... **Next**, put a little butter in a pan.*

We use *finally* for the last instruction, not *in the end*:
***First**, boil some milk in the pan. **Then** add the chocolate powder to the milk and mix. **Finally**, pour it into a cup and enjoy it!*

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