

On the Misuse of Besides

The use of **besides** as an adverb has become popular among many of my Chinese students, indicating that its use is popularized by standard curriculum.

Unhelpfully, many dictionaries, including the OED, do not expand on its informal nature.

First, there is the intermediate distinction between **beside** and **besides** that may need to be addressed in intermediate English classes.

Second, there is the distinction between **besides** as a preposition and an adverb that also needs to be made aware of.

Speakspeak.com provides some clear examples on this.

The use of the adverb is often used by my Chinese students in formal academic papers. Typically when they feel that **moreover**, **furthermore**, and **in addition to** have been used to much. Its use here is not incorrect, but it is jarring.

Longman notes that it is “spoken” and has a register note suggesting it not be used in written English.

Grammarly describes it as less “stiff” and more “conversational” than **moreover** and **in addition to**.

Additionally, speakspeak.com notes that as an adverb it’s sense is “in any case” or “anyway.” I agree with this denotation which seems absent in many dictionaries. I would also argue that it can carry a connotation of dismissiveness.

Consider the following example.

I don’t have time to buy him a present and I have another birthday party to go to that day. Besides, I never really liked him anyway.