

Transitions

After reading this article, you should be able to utilize effective transitional expressions.

The Importance and Function of Transitions

In academic and professional writing, your goal is to convey information clearly and concisely, often persuading the reader to agree with your point of view. Transitions help you to achieve these goals by establishing logical connections between sentences, paragraphs, and sections of your papers. Transitions tell readers what to do with the information that is presented to them. Whether transitions are single words, quick phrases or full sentences, they function as signs for readers that tell them how to think about, organize, and react to old and new ideas in your writing.

Transitions signal relationships between ideas such as: **“Another example coming up—stay alert!”** or **“Here’s an exception to my previous statement”** or **“Although this idea appears to be true, here’s the real story.”** Transitions provide the reader with directions for how to piece together your ideas into a logically coherent argument. Transitions are not just verbal decorations that embellish your paper by making it sound or read better. They are words with particular meanings that tell the reader to think and react in a particular way to your ideas. Transitions provide the reader with important cues, helping your audience understand the logic of how your ideas fit together.

Signs that You Might Need to Work on Your Transitions

Here are some possible clues to help you decide if you need to work on your transitions:

- **Your instructor has written comments** like “choppy,” “jumpy,” “abrupt,” “flow,” “need signposts,” or “how is this related?” on your papers.
- **Your readers** (instructors, friends, or classmates) **had trouble following your organization or train of thought.**
- **You tend to write the way you think**, and your brain jumps from one idea to another pretty quickly.
- **You wrote your paper in several “chunks”** and then pasted them together.
- **You’re working on a group paper.** The draft you’re working on was created by pasting pieces of several people’s writing together.

Organization

Since the clarity and effectiveness of your transitions depends on how well your paper is organized, you may want to evaluate your paper’s organization before you work on transitions. In the margins of your draft, summarize in a word or short phrase what each paragraph is about or how it fits into your analysis as a whole. This exercise will help you to see the order of and connection between your ideas more clearly.

If after doing this exercise you find that you still have difficulty linking your ideas together in a coherent fashion, your problem might be with organization (For help in this area and a more thorough explanation of the “reverse outlining” technique described in the previous paragraph, see the Writing Center’s handout on organization).

How Transitions Work

The organization of your written work includes two elements:

1. **The order in which you present the different parts of your discussion/argument**
2. **The relationships between these parts.** Transitions cannot substitute for good organization, but they can make your organization clearer and easier to follow.

Consider the following example:

El Pais, a Latin American country, has a new democratic government after having been a dictatorship for many years. Assume that you want to argue that *El Pais* is not as democratic as the conventional view would have us believe. One way to effectively organize your argument would be to present the conventional view and then to provide the reader with your critical response to this view. **In Paragraph A** you would describe some reasons why someone might consider *El Pais* highly democratic. **In Paragraph B** you would refute these points. **The transition between these paragraphs should establish the logical connection between these two key elements of your argument.** Your transition should tell the reader that the information in paragraph B contradicts the information in paragraph A. As a result, you might organize your argument, including the transition that links paragraph A with paragraph B, in the following manner:

- **Paragraph A** uses points that support the view that *El Pais's* new government is very democratic.
 - **Transition:** Despite the previous arguments, there are many reasons to think that *El Pais's* new government is not as democratic as typically believed.
- **Paragraph B** uses points that contradict the view that *El Pais's* new government is very democratic.

In this case, the transition words “Despite the previous arguments,” suggest that the reader should not believe paragraph A and instead should consider the writer’s reasons for questioning *El Pais*’s democracy.

As the example above suggests, transitions can help reinforce the underlying logic of your paper’s organization by providing the reader with essential information regarding the relationship between your ideas. Transitions act as the glue that binds the components of your argument or discussion into a unified, coherent, and persuasive whole.

Types of Transitions

Now that you have a general idea of how to develop effective transitions in your writing, below are some different types of transitions.

The types of transitions available to you are as diverse as the circumstances in which you need to use them. **A transition can be a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire paragraph.** In each case, **transitions function the same way:** first, the transition either **directly summarizes the content** of a preceding sentence, paragraph, or section or **implies a summary** by reminding the reader of what has come before. This helps the reader anticipate or comprehend the information that you are presenting. Consider the different kinds of transitions listed below:

- **Between sections:** It may be necessary to include transitional paragraphs that summarize the information you just covered and specify the relevance of this information to the following section of your paper.
- **Between paragraphs:** if the content of your paragraphs leads logically from one to the next, a transition will highlight a relationship that already exists by summarizing the

previous paragraph and suggesting something of the content of the paragraph that follows. A transition between paragraphs can be a word or two (*however, for example, similarly*), a phrase, or a sentence. Transitions can be at the end of the first paragraph, at the beginning of the second paragraph, or in both places.

- **Within paragraphs:** transitions within paragraphs act as cues by helping readers to anticipate what is coming before they read it. These tend to be single words or short phrases.

Transitional Expressions

Effective transitions are words or phrases that indicate to the reader the *kind* of logical relationships you want to convey. The table below should make it easier for you to find these words or phrases. Whenever you have trouble finding a word, phrase, or sentence to serve as an effective transition, refer to this table for assistance. In the left column are kinds of logical relationships. Examples of words or phrases that express this logical relationship are listed in the right column (Keep in mind that each of these words or phrases may have a slightly different meaning. Consult a dictionary or writer’s handbook if you are unsure of the exact meaning of a word or phrase).

Logical Relationship	Transitional Expression
Similarity	also, in the same way, just as ... so too, likewise, similarly
Exception/Contrast	but, however, in spite of, on the one hand ... on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, in contrast, on the contrary, still, yet

Sequence/Order	first, second, third, ... next, then, finally
Time	after, afterward, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, immediately, later, meanwhile, now, recently, simultaneously, subsequently, then
Example	for example, for instance, namely, specifically, to illustrate
Emphasis	even, indeed, in fact, of course, truly
Place/Position	above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there
Cause and Effect	accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus
Additional Support/Evidence	additionally, again, also, and, as well, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then
Conclusion/Summary	finally, in a word, in brief, briefly, in conclusion, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, thus, to conclude, to summarize, in sum, to sum up, in summary

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