



The University Writing Center

Connecting Writers with Readers

Transitions

THE PRINCIPLE

Transitions are words and phrases used between sentences or paragraphs to connect the parts, *i.e.*, to make sure your writing flows smoothly and that there is a logical progression and organization to your ideas. Transitions ensure that the connections you are making in your writing are evident to the reader, and clearly linked to the ideas before and after.

Transition Words and Phrases:

These are your friends, and the quickest way to craft a transition. In order to select the most relevant word or phrase, you first need to know: What is the shift you are trying to make? Here is a list of a few common transition words or phrases and the corresponding shifts that they signal:

FUNCTION/SHIFT SIGNALLED	TRANSITION WORD/PHRASE
Addition/Connection	also, and, besides, another
Example/Indication	after all, as an illustration, for example
Elaboration	actually, in other words, furthermore, another
Comparison	along the same lines, likewise, similarly
Contrast	however, although, but
Cause and Effect	as a result, therefore, consequently

*notice that the word **another** appears in several places; there are some transition words that can serve multiple purposes

Paragraph transitions:

While the above words and phrases can connect either sentences or paragraphs, there are some tricks you can use that apply specifically to paragraph transitions, which are places when it is often the most difficult and the most crucial to maintain the flow and structure of your paper.

Repeat a key word or phrase. For example:

The protagonist of the novel continued to retreat to the forest in times of distress, underscoring the fact that trees in the novel represent safety and comfort found in nature. (<- last sentence of paragraph)

Another way that the protagonist finds safety and comfort is through her relationship with her best friend. (<- first sentence of following paragraph)

By repeating the phrase "safety and comfort" as well as using the transition word "another," the writer connects the idea in the new paragraph with the one preceding it, allowing her to both follow the theme of "safety and comfort" into the next paragraph, as well as to introduce a discussion of the protagonist's relationship with her best friend.

A COMMON PROBLEM (AND THE SOLUTION)

You can't expect your transition words to do all the work in your writing. It doesn't do much good to use a transition word, and then completely veer off-topic in your sentence.

For example:

The relationship between Jane and her best friend exemplifies the importance of female relationships and how they provide strength and sustenance within the confines of a patriarchal culture.

Along the same lines, the market scene in Chapter Four exemplifies the prevailing economic structure of the period.

As you can see, the subject matter in the new paragraph actually has nothing to do with the discussion in the preceding paragraph; therefore, the transition phrase not only becomes useless, it actually contradicts the content of the sentence. Therefore, make sure that both your transition words and the content of the transition sentence work together to help the reader understand the connections you are making.

NOW SOME FINE PRINT

Not only are transitional words and phrases unable to do all the work for you, transitions themselves, even when artfully constructed, are not enough to make up for ineffective organization. Make sure that you have already fully outlined your ideas and the order in which you will present them before you sit down to write. If you do this, then even if your transitions are not fully formed in your first draft, it will be easy to insert them during the revision process. If there is no structure to your paper in the first place, then your revision process will involve an overhaul in organization, not just a few added words and phrases to help improve connection and flow. Reading aloud, either to yourself or someone else, can be of great benefit in helping you identify places where your transitions might need a little more attention. Notice places where you seem to stumble, or move off-topic and might need to look back to remind yourself what you were talking about. These are a few clues that a lack of clear transitions could be the problem.

Works Consulted:

Graff, Gerald, Cathy Birkenstein, and Russell Durst. *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. 2nd Ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 2012.

Ruszkiewicz, John J. *A Reader's Guide to College Writing*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014.