

Transitions in Essays: ☺ In both academic writing and professional writing, your goal is to convey information clearly and concisely, if not to convert the reader to your way of thinking. Transitions help you to achieve these goals by establishing logical connections between sentences, paragraphs, and sections of your papers. In other words, transitions tell readers what to do with the information you present to them. Whether 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 as they read through what you have written.

☺ 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." Basically, 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. In providing the reader with these important cues, transitions help readers understand the logic of how your ideas fit together.

☺ How can you tell whether you need to work on your transitions? Here are some possible clues:

- 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) tell you that they had trouble following your organization or train of thought.
- You tend to write the way you think—and your brain often jumps from one idea to another pretty quickly.
- You wrote your paper in several discrete "chunks" and then pasted them together.
- You are working on a group paper; the draft you are working on was created by pasting pieces of several people's writing together.

Types of transitions

Now that you have a general idea of how to go about developing effective transitions in your writing, let us briefly discuss the types of transitions your writing will use. 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, it functions the same way: first, the transition either directly summarizes the content of a preceding sentence, paragraph, or section, or it implies that summary. Then it helps the reader anticipate or comprehend the new information that you wish to present.

1. **Transitions between sections**—Particularly in longer works, it may be necessary to include transitional paragraphs that move the reader from one idea to the next: demonstrate the relationship between one idea and the next.

2. **Transitions between paragraphs**—If you have done a good job of arranging paragraphs so that the content of one leads logically to the next, the transition will highlight a relationship that already exists between your ideas. It's not always as simple as summarizing the last point and highlighting the next point, so think more broadly about how you work from one idea to the next. A transition between paragraphs can be a single sentence or even a couple of sentences. Transitions can be at the end of the first paragraph, at the beginning of the second paragraph, or in both places.

3. **Transitions within paragraphs**—As with transitions between sections and paragraphs, transitions within paragraphs act as cues by helping readers to see the relationship between ideas/paragraphs/points. Within paragraphs, transitions tend to be single words or short phrases. **Remember: The transition may occur as the last sentence of the paragraph or the first sentence of the next paragraph. Whichever method you choose, your topic sentence/focus sentence needs to be clear and strong.**

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/transitions.html> and <http://www.mygretutor.com/GREEssay/transitionSentence.aspx>

Let's see transitions in action!

☺ The organization of your written work includes two elements: (1) the order in which you have chosen to present the different parts of your discussion or argument, and (2) the relationships you build between these parts. Transitions cannot substitute for good organization, but they can make your organization clearer and easier to follow. Take a look at the following example:

Here is an example of the last two sentences of a paragraph:

Even though I had decided not to have a party when my parents were away, having a couple of people over and having alcohol at the house was definitely one of the most irresponsible things I have ever done. That decision led to my friend's accident and the responsibility of that accident was as much mine as it was his.

*If the paragraph that comes after this one is going to expand on the author's argument about responsibility, it needs to begin by echoing the ideas in the previous paragraph. A bad transition from the above sentences would disconnect the ideas and likely confuse the audience.

That decision led to my friend's accident and the responsibility of that accident was as much mine as it was his.

When I started college I decided that I would think ahead before I made decisions that might influence my future so dramatically. I think about what impact even the most minor choice could have on my life if it turned into a situation that was out of my control.

*Notice the drastic shift in time and place that occurs between these two sentences. This transition would be difficult for the audience to follow because suddenly the author is talking about a completely different set of circumstances. The same shift could be made with appropriate transitions that would ease the audience into the new situation. For example:

That decision led to my friend's accident and the responsibility of that accident was as much mine as it was his.

I learned that responsibility meant thinking about the possible consequences of my actions before something bad happens. I make use of this lesson even now that I am in college by thinking ahead about the impact that even the most minor choice could have on my life if it turned into a situation that was out of my control.

*In this example the addition of one transition sentence connects the ideas from one paragraph to the next. The audience can follow along as the author has transitioned from a story about high school to the present day impact without a dramatic shift in ideas.

*An important point in developing transition sentences is to simply remember that your audience must be able to follow the progression of ideas from one paragraph to the next. Starting paragraphs with examples makes this almost impossible so it is necessary to think about why your examples are significant and to begin and end paragraphs with arguments and justifications (take a look back at the section Sentences – Introduction, Body and Conclusion Sentences for a review of arguments, justifications, and examples). Following this pattern, your audience will be able to follow a continuity of ideas and will easily be able to identify the organizational pattern of your essay.

*****Although the “looking backward-looking forward” model for transitions is useful, it is often too simplistic for your essays. You really just want to show the relationship between ideas. Those relationships might be one of these ideas or something else entirely:**

- ☺ **The next point expands on/provides another example for the previous point**
- ☺ **The next point contradicts/contrasts the previous point**
- ☺ **The next point is more important than the previous point**
- ☺ **The next point introduces a new perspective on the topic**
- ☺ **The next point's idea is a consequence/result of the previous point.**
- ☺ **The next point is an exception to the previous point.**
- ☺ **The next point is a comparison to the previous point.**
- ☺ **The next point clarifies the previous point.**