

Strategies for Connecting Sentences

For readers to follow your ideas easily, your sentences need to connect smoothly. How can you develop this skill? Three sentence-transforming strategies are described below.

Note: The principles in this handout are derived from Joseph Williams' *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). This book is available in Roberts Library, call number PE 1421 .W546 1990. It is a quick and useful read.

Principle #1: Use pronouns to link ideas.

You probably already use pronouns in your writing to avoid using the same noun over and over again.

My teacher assigned a paper. My teacher asked us to turn in a first draft.

vs.

*My teacher assigned a paper. **He** asked us to turn in a first draft.*

Pronouns can also play another significant role in your sentences. The pronouns “this,” “these,” and “those” are helpful tools for moving smoothly from one idea to the next. Basically, they summarize the word or idea that you have just written and allow you to transition to the next idea easily. Take a look at the following examples.

*Pronouns are helpful parts of speech. **These words** allow the writer to tie ideas together without being repetitive.*

*Research is the foundation of most papers. **This task** can seem daunting at first, but becomes easier with practice.*

*In the past, researchers had to work their way through huge, heavy indexes. **Those resources** have now been replaced by online databases.*

One note of caution here: when you use the pronouns “this,” “these,” or “those” in your sentences, be sure to include a specific word with them so that the reader can be sure what the pronouns are referring to. In the example sentences above, “words,” “task,” and “resources” have been used to make the pronouns’ meaning clear.

Principle #2: Repeat key words and concepts.

Another way to connect your sentences together smoothly is to repeat key words and concepts throughout the paragraph. The source of these key words or concepts is the first sentence in your paragraph, or the topic sentence. Here is an example paragraph that shows how this principle works:

***Connecting sentences** together well allows the **reader** to follow the **flow** of your **ideas** easily. If your **sentences** do not have clear **transitions**, the **reader** will have to work to figure out how the **ideas fit together**, and most **readers** are not willing to work that hard. Many great **ideas** are never **read** simply because they were written so poorly.*

Notice that several synonyms are used in this paragraph. For example, “fit together” and “transitions” are synonyms of “connecting.” These synonyms allow the writer to repeat key concepts without being repetitive.

Principle #3: Use transitional works and phrases.

Transitions like “in addition,” “for example,” and “however” show your reader how your argument fits together.

When should I use a transition?

Always use a transition when you begin a new paragraph.

Within paragraphs, though, each sentence does not need a transition. In fact, using too many transitions can be confusing to a reader. However, transitions can be very helpful in the following situations:

i. When you are adding a point to your argument:

In addition, also, moreover . . .

ii. When you are introducing a contrasting point:

However, nevertheless, although . . .

iii. When you are giving an example:

For example, for instance . . .

For more information on using transitions, see Purdue University’s handout at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/574/02/>.