

Transitions: The Glue That Holds Our Ideas & Essays Together

(Adapted from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

Your goal in writing any paper is to convey your ideas as clearly and concisely as you possibly can. Transitions help you do this. They are the words, phrases, and paragraphs that establish connections for your reader by telling him what to do with the information you have given him—how to interpret, think about, or organize it. They can also serve as roadmaps explaining where you have been and where you intend to go, helping your reader to “keep up” with your argument. In short, transitions help your reader to better understand the shape and logic of your essay.

Some Signs That You Need Transitions:

- Your professor writes words like: “choppy,” “abrupt,” “flow?” on your essay.
- Your readers tell you that they cannot follow your train of thought.
- You wrote your paper in “chunks” as time allowed.
- A group paper in which several students had a hand in the final product.

A Word about Organization:

Do bear in mind that transitions are not a substitute for the logical organization of your essay. Your paper needs to be structured in such a way that your argument flows in a natural and rational fashion. No amount of transitions will make up for a logically-flawed essay. Therefore, you should always check your essay to make sure that the major sections are logically following one after another and that each paragraph is building upon the previous paragraph.

How Transitions Work:

So, assuming that your paper is organized in a logical fashion, transitions build relationships between the various parts of your essay, thus making it easier to follow. Let us say that you are writing an essay on the Reformation and your first paragraph speaks of Luther’s work in Wittenberg. In your next paragraph, you wish to talk about Zwingli’s work in Zurich. It might seem incoherent to speak of one Reformer’s work in one city and then another Reformer’s work in another without some transition. Therefore, you might begin your next paragraph on Zwingli with the transition, “similarly”:

“Similarly, Huldrych Zwingli was leading a reform of the church in Zurich at the same time as Luther’s in Wittenberg.”

And then go on with your paragraph. You see how your reader is led along by your hand in his understanding of your essay. Or perhaps you wish to point out a difference between Luther and Zwingli. In that case, you might begin the paragraph using the transition, “by contrast”:

“By contrast, Huldrych Zwingli was leading quite a different reform in Zurich from Luther’s attempt in Wittenberg.”

So you see how the use of transitions help you establish the logic between paragraphs and also cue your reader as to what you are going to do next. Also note that each sentence can be used as a perfectly good topic sentence for the paragraph.

Types of Transitions:

You will use transitions in three different ways: between sections, between paragraphs, and within paragraphs.

- Between sections: Sometimes in longer papers, you might need to insert a transitional paragraph midway or more in your essay summarizing its major points and how they relate to what follows.
- Between paragraphs: As we illustrated above, transitions help connect paragraphs together emphasizing their relationship for the reader. They may be one word or a phrase.
- Within a paragraph: To help readers anticipate what is coming. Usually one word.

Transitional Expressions:

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 or 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

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/transitions/>