TRANSITIONS

What this handout is about

In this crazy, mixed-up, topsy-turvy world of ours, transitions glue our ideas and our essays together. This handout enlists you in the cause.

The function and importance of transitions

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 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 "window dressing" 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.

Signs that you might need to work on your transitions

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.

Organization

Since the clarity and effectiveness of your transitions will depend greatly on how well you have organized your paper, 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 should 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 may not be with transitions but with organization. For help in this area (and a more thorough explanation of the "reverse outlining" technique described in the previous paragraph), please 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 have chosen to present the different parts of your discussion or argument, and (2) the relationships you construct 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:

*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. So, in Paragraph A you would enumerate all the reasons that someone might consider *El Pais* highly democratic, while in Paragraph B you would refute these points. The transition that would establish the logical connection between these two key elements of your argument would indicate to 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:** 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:** 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 viewing *El Pais*’s democracy as suspect.

As the example 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. In this way, 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 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 summarize for the reader the information just covered and specify the relevance of this information to the discussion in the following section.

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 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.

3. **Transitions within paragraphs**—As with transitions between sections and paragraphs, transitions within paragraphs act as cues by helping readers to anticipate what is coming before they read it. Within paragraphs, transitions tend to be single words or short phrases.

**Transitional expressions**

Effectively constructing each transition often depends upon your ability to identify words or phrases that will indicate for 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 the information in the table for assistance. Look in the left column of the table for the kind of logical relationship you are trying to express. Then look in the right column of the table for examples of words or phrases that express this logical relationship.

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP</th>
<th>TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>also, in the same way, just as ... so too, likewise, similarly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exception/Contrast</td>
<td>but, however, in spite of, on the one hand ... on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, in contrast, on the contrary,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sequence/Order</strong></td>
<td>first, second, third, ... next, then, finally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>after, afterward, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, immediately, later, meanwhile, now, recently, simultaneously, subsequently, then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example</strong></td>
<td>for example, for instance, namely, specifically, to illustrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emphasis</strong></td>
<td>even, indeed, in fact, of course, truly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place/Position</strong></td>
<td>above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cause and Effect</strong></td>
<td>accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional Support or Evidence</strong></td>
<td>additionally, again, also, and, as well, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion/Summary</strong></td>
<td>finally, in a word, in brief, in conclusion, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, thus, to conclude, to summarize, in sum, in summary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TRANSITIONS BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS (Part 1)

Capturing the reader's interest is key in the introductory paragraph. Maintaining the interest happens in the body of the essay, and the most effective way to maintain reader interest and to ensure that the reader is able to follow the essay is to use transitions. Using transition words or phrases shows the reader the connection between paragraphs. There are three common ways to connect paragraphs:

- Repeat key words.
- Refer to ideas from the paragraph before.
- Use transitional expressions and sentences.

When a word from one paragraph is repeated in the following paragraph, the reader is able to follow the essay more easily.

*Example*

**Topic: The Causes of Traffic Accidents**

End of Paragraph 1: Even the most careful drivers cannot always avoid the dangers of bad weather; therefore, the most **sensible** drivers try to avoid the bad weather.

Start of Paragraph 2: Weather is not the only hazard on the road.

The word "weather" is a key word. Also, "not the only" is a transitional phrase that links one idea with another idea.

Referring to ideas from previous paragraphs shows a clear connection between the paragraphs keep the reader on track.

*Example*

**Topic: Teaching Animals to Talk**

End of Paragraph 1: It was eventually determined that the **chimpanzee** would never be able to **master** the human language but by observing him, scientists were able to gain a better understanding of how chimpanzees communicate with each other.

Start of Paragraph 2: Bonobo chimpanzees, on the other hand, have proven to be quite good at acquiring some form of language.

The idea of how well different kinds of chimpanzees can acquire language is clearly compared in these two sentences. This repetition of ideas, and use of a contrasting transitional phrase, helps the reader follow the writer's discussion.

TRANSITIONS BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS (Part 2)

Find yourself using, “First...my second reason is...Finally...” for transitions? If so, it’s time to eliminate these basic words to help your writing become more sophisticated.

**Here are a few tricks you could use:**

1) **Use a pronoun to refer to a person or idea mentioned in the preceding paragraph:**

   *And that’s still not all...*

   **Some of these feelings...**

   *What is this new formula?*

   2) **Repeat a key word.** Identify a key word that you used in the preceding paragraph, and then use the key word (or a synonym) to bridge the sentences.

   *Read the following excerpt from a persuasive essay in which the writer opposes year-round schooling:*

   Like any other facility, keeping a school open requires a great deal of money. When a school changes to a year-round schedule, the costs skyrocket. Keeping school open in the middle of summer requires air conditioning, and that adds significantly to the school’s expenses. The usual utility bills grow because of the additional open-school time. Finally, teachers must be paid for all the weeks they are working. With all these factors, the cost of keeping schools open becomes immensely high. For example, a high school in Arizona had a cost increase of $157,000 when they switched to year-round schooling. Some schools may not be able to handle such increases, and other schools that can handle these expenses could be doing better things with the money. Is year-round school really where the money should go?

   **Money is not the only factor involved in this debate.** We must also consider the more important issues of student learning.

   3) **Use connectives.** See the reverse side (or scroll down if you’re online) of this sheet for some transition words you might use.

   *Transition Words & Phrases*

   **Sequence:**

   again, also, and, and then, besides, finally, first...second...third, furthermore, last, moreover, next, still, too
Time:

after a bit, after a few days, after a while, afterward, as long as, as soon as, at last, at length, at that time, before, earlier, immediately, in the meantime, in the past, lately, later, meanwhile, now, presently, shortly, simultaneously, since, so far, soon, then, thereafter, until, when

Comparison:

again, also, in the same way, likewise, once more, similarly

Contrast:

although, but, despite, even though, however, in contrast, in spite of, instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, on the contrary, on the one hand...on the other hand, regardless, still, though, yet

Examples:

after all, even, for example, for instance, indeed, in fact, of course, specifically, such as, the following example, to illustrate

Cause and Effect:

accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, for this purpose, hence, so, then, therefore, thereupon, thus, to this end

Place:

above, adjacent to, below, beyond, closer to, elsewhere, far, farther on, here, near, nearby, opposite to, there, to the left, to the right

Concession:

although it is true that, granted that, I admit that, it may appear that, naturally, of course

Summary, Repetition, or Conclusion:

as a result, as has been noted, as I have said, as we have seen, as mentioned earlier, in any event, in conclusion, in other words, in short, on the whole, therefore, to summarize

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Source: http://docs.google.com/Doc?docid=0AeKI_somgqtkZGZqZmtqa3NfMjJcGdubnI0dg&hl=en
WRITING TRANSITIONS (Part 3)

Good transitions can connect paragraphs and turn disconnected writing into a unified whole. Instead of treating paragraphs as separate ideas, transitions can help readers understand how paragraphs work together, reference one another, and build to a larger point. The key to producing good transitions is highlighting connections between corresponding paragraphs. By referencing in one paragraph the relevant material from previous ones, writers can develop important points for their readers.

It is a good idea to continue one paragraph where another leaves off (instances where this is especially challenging may suggest that the paragraphs don't belong together at all.) Picking up key phrases from the previous paragraph and highlighting them in the next can create an obvious progression for readers. Many times, it only takes a few words to draw these connections. Instead of writing transitions that could connect any paragraph to any other paragraph, write a transition that could only connect one specific paragraph to another specific paragraph.

**Example:** Overall, Management Systems International has logged increased sales in every sector, leading to a significant rise in third-quarter profits.

*Another important thing to note is that the corporation had expanded its international influence.*

**Revision:** Overall, Management Systems International has logged increased sales in every sector, leading to a significant rise in third-quarter profits.

These impressive profits are largely due to the corporation’s expanded international influence.

**Example:** Fearing for the loss of Danish lands, Christian IV signed the Treaty of Lubeck, effectively ending the Danish phase of the 30 Years War.

*But then something else significant happened. The Swedish intervention began.*

**Revision:** Fearing for the loss of more Danish lands, Christian IV signed the Treaty of Lubeck, effectively ending the Danish phase of the 30 Years War.

Shortly after Danish forces withdrew, the Swedish intervention began.

**Example:** Amy Tan became a famous author after her novel, The Joy Luck Club, skyrocketed up the bestseller list.

*There are other things to note about Tan as well. Amy Tan also participates in the satirical garage band the Rock Bottom Remainders with Stephen King and Dave Barry.*

**Revision:** Amy Tan became a famous author after her novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, skyrocketed up the bestseller list.

Though her fiction is well known, her work with the satirical garage band the Rock Bottom Remainders receives far less publicity.

**Source:** “Transitions and Transitional Devices.” The Writing Lab & The OWL at Purdue and Purdue University. 3 November 2009 <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/574/01/>.