Paragraph Transitions

Although your paragraphs will be self-contained, they must interlock effectively to produce a strong overall argument. Transitions both between and within paragraphs are essential because they signal changes in direction and help the reader follow those changes. Simple words like however, in addition, for example, although, whereas and finally tie sentences together effectively.

The most important transitions come between paragraphs. Try to establish a connection between the first sentence of a new paragraph and the last sentence of the preceding one. Again a linking word may be the easiest way:

. . . Thus the pattern established by Dickens in the first chapter is consistent throughout the rest of the first volume.

However, Volume Two offers a new approach to the narrative. . .

The echo of a key phrase or word can also be effective:

. . . Whatever Lear's faults, it cannot be denied that he loves his daughters.

Unfortunately, love counts for little in the realm of Regan and Goneril. . . .

However, echoing the preceding sentence too closely will result in repetition rather than transition. This example was an attempt to link the introduction to the body of the essay:

. . . The other important function Bottom has is his major contribution to the humorous aspect of the play.

One of the major functions of Bottom is his contribution to the play's humour. . . .

The transition may require more than just a word; a transitional sentence may be called for:

The evidence thus suggests that there is no other option.

And yet there may still be a solution. If you disregard . . .

The transitional sentence does not indicate what will come next in the paragraph, but it establishes that this paragraph is a negation of the last. Note that this kind of sentence displaces the topic sentence you would expect to find at the beginning of the paragraph; the topic sentence should follow it.
Sentences must follow one another in a logical pattern. If thoughts follow one another without sufficient connection, the essay will make no sense. Within each paragraph you will be using transitions almost continuously.

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.

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, please see the Writing Center's handout on organization and/or make an appointment to see a tutor.

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 this organization clearer and easier to follow. The following example should help to make this point clear.

*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 want to enumerate all the reasons that someone might consider *El Pais* highly democratic, while in Paragraph B you would want to 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 in support of 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 in the upcoming paragraph.

As the previous 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.

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.

<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,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sequence/Order</strong></td>
<td>first, second, third, ... next, then, finally</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>
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<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>
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