

Transitions

An essay consists of paragraphs containing information related to your thesis. Think of each paragraph as a mini-essay in itself; although it comments on your main point, its relationship to the “mini-essays” before and after it needs to be made clear to readers so they can follow your reasoning. Making this relationship clear, or explicit, is done by using a transition—a word, phrase, or sentence—that links information in a way that guides readers’ thoughts down the path you want them to take.

Transitions belong to the realm of “cohesion,” that is, linking up words, sentences, and paragraphs in order to make a text. If words are the bricks of a wall, transitions are the mortar holding the bricks together. Professors often note that student essays often lack transitions between paragraphs, which suggests that students might be connecting individual paragraphs to their thesis but need to work on the interrelationships at the paragraph level. The following consists of transition strategies to try in your writing.

Repetition

In this technique, you might use a key phrase or term from the first paragraph in the first sentence of the next paragraph, which elaborates on the prior paragraph. By repeating information, you show that the two paragraphs are related.

Transitional Words/Phrases

These show readers how the information between paragraphs or sentences is connected. Here are some commonly used transitions:

- To show passage of time: in the past; now; next; finally; after; meanwhile; later; since; at last.
- To illustrate an idea with details: for example; in particular; above all; that is; specifically; to illustrate.
- To show causality: consequently; as a result; because; accordingly; thereupon; then; hence; therefore.
- To compare: also; in the same way; likewise; similarly.
- To contrast: although; but; conversely; however; in contrast; nevertheless; nonetheless; on the contrary; otherwise; still; yet; on the other hand.
- To conclude an idea: consequently; in any event; in other words; to sum up; that is; therefore.

Order out of Chaos: The Drafting Process and Transitions

Ideas in the mind are fleeting; once on paper, they are concrete, something you can push around and manipulate. One purpose of the drafting process is discovery, a stage in which you learn for yourself what your ideas and their relationships to each other are. In this stage, typically the first draft, capture your ideas before you forget them. Relationships between your ideas might not be clear to you, but that’s okay. What this means is that you might write paragraphs that are, indeed, mini-essays, unconnected to each other except by the fact that they all comment on your topic or thesis. In this case, start to think about the relationships you see. Your reader might not connect the information the same way you do; you must provide the connections you want your reader to follow.

When revising, begin making relationships explicit where before they were unclear. This may entail re-arranging your paragraphs to reflect the order that you are giving their information. Ask your sentences, “How does the reader need to link this information to follow my argument?” You might think of transitions as “commenting” on the information being presented; by commenting, you step back from the information contained in a paragraph, join your reader, and verbally point out the connections that need to be made.