

Using Transitions

Transitions Within a Sentence

Linking expressions can be used within a sentence to connect two related clauses.

Example

To plant similar trees, *on the other hand*, could result in one disease wiping out all the trees on the block.

If used to connect two sentences, transition words will appear at the beginning of the second sentence.

Example

Skateboarding is prohibited in certain public areas. *As a result*, many skaters use designated skating areas and are working hard to convince the city council to build more skate parks. A strategy for revising your writing to clarify and reinforce the connections between ideas is to closely examine the transitions between sentences.

As always, it is helpful if your draft is double-spaced. First, draw a box around the last word of the first sentence and the first word of the next sentence. Identify the relationship that connects the sentences. If the relationship is clear, then move on to the next sentence. If the relationship is unclear, and you cannot identify it, try adding a linking expression to serve as a transition.

Exercise 1

Revise the following sentences by writing a linking expression on the line provided. Your answers will vary depending on your word choice, but suggested.

1. We wanted to go to a movie, _____ the theater was closed.
2. Joey's car was full of gas, _____ we drove it to the beach.
3. The ballet did not impress the students. _____, the break dancers were a big hit.

4. We visited Phoenix, Tucson, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and _____, Las Vegas.
5. Some chili recipes do not include kidney beans. _____ would be the traditional West Texas chili.

The purpose of using transitions between sentences is to create unified paragraphs. Like the rungs of a ladder, unified paragraphs allow the reader to move one step at a time and to follow the main idea to its conclusion.

Transitions Between Paragraphs

As discussed in Lesson 5, paragraphs are organized in many ways. The same transitions—or linking expressions—used to connect sentences can be used to connect paragraphs, and will help clarify the relationship between ideas in paragraphs.

Checking to see that your transitions between paragraphs are clear is similar to the method you used when checking transitions between sentences. Place a box around the last sentence of a paragraph and the first sentence of the next paragraph. Identify the relationship that connects the two ideas. If the relationship is clear and the transition is smooth, then there is no need to revise. If the relationship is not clear and there is not a smooth transition, sentences within the paragraphs may need to be rearranged, the paragraphs may need to be better organized, or the transition between the paragraphs may need to be revised. Transitions between paragraphs are very important for maintaining coherence.

Chronological Order

Chronological order is shown by using such transition words as *first*, *second*, *finally*, *next*, *then*, *afterward*, *later*, *before*, *eventually*, and *in the future*.

Example

Before the employees arrive in the morning, the building is empty. It is then that the janitor can clean thoroughly.

Example

First, it is necessary to collect sources about your research topic. Second, you must put these sources in order of importance. Finally, you must read the information and take notes. Chronological order is a common organizational technique for writers of fiction, as you will see in the next example.

Example

“In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighbourhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of us becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be unlucky in life; and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to all unlucky infants of either gender, born towards the small hours on a Friday night.” —*David Copperfield*

Spatial Order

Transition words that show spatial order are *beside, in the middle, next to, to the right, on top of, in front of, behind, against, and beneath*. Spatial order is helpful when describing a place or the setting of a story.

Example

Against the wall, there is a dresser. *On top* of the dresser is where Brad keeps his spare change.

Example

There is a damp cave *beneath* the house. If you enter the cave, take the fork *to the right*, or, as legend has it, you might disturb the ancient spirits.

Order of Importance

Transition words that show the order of importance are *more, less, most, least, most important, least important, and more importantly*.

Example

Yesterday was a beautiful, sunny day, but *more importantly*, it was my birthday.

Comparison and Contrast

Transition words that show comparison and contrast are *likewise, however, similarly, in contrast, a different kind, unlike this, and another difference*.

Example

The book *Of Mice and Men* begins with George and Lennie walking through the woods. *In contrast*, the movie begins with a woman in a red dress running through a field.

Example

My mother and grandmother both taught preschool.
I chose, *however*, to become an engineer.

Cause and Effect

Transition words used to show cause and effect are *therefore*, *as a result of*, *consequently*, *thus*, *one cause*, *one effect*, *another cause*, and *another effect*.

Example

Security officers guarded the gates of the airport. *As a result*, traffic slowed considerably on the highway.

Example

The recipe calls for two tablespoons of butter, and,
consequently, the cookies will be thin and crisp.

Classification

Transition words that show classification are helpful, especially in scientific writing where classification is an important step in understanding the natural world. Transition words include *another group*, *the first type*, *one kind*, *other sorts*, *other types*, and *other kinds*.

Example

One type of tennis player, like John McEnroe, lets his emotions show on the court. *Another type* of player stays calm throughout the match, whether the calls are bothersome or not.

Introducing Examples

To introduce examples in your piece of writing, you can use transition words such as *for example*, *one example*, *one kind*, *one type*, *one sort*, and *for instance*.

Example

One example of a Greek tragedy is *Antigone*.

Example

Most insects have very short life spans. *For instance*, the fruit fly can expect to complete its life cycle in less than 48 hours.

Introducing Contradictions

When comparing and contrasting in a piece of writing, you often must introduce contradictions. They can be very effective tools for persuasion. Transition words that introduce contradictions are *nonetheless*, *however*, *in spite of*, *otherwise*, *instead*, and *on the contrary*.

Example

The storm continued to toss the ship and managed to snap off the tip of the mast. *In spite of* this, they sailed on, desperate to reach Hawaii.

Example

Growers have recently marketed prunes as dried plums. *Nonetheless*, most people still refer to them as prunes.

Introducing Conclusions, Summaries, or Generalizations

Wrapping up your piece is a form of transition. As you conclude your work, you need to lead your reader to the end. Transition words for concluding are *in conclusion*, *therefore*, and *as a result*. Summaries and generalizations can be effectively introduced using *in summary* or *in general*.

Example

Therefore, Cinco de Mayo is celebrated differently in the United States than in Mexico.

Example

In general, the phenomenon of the Bermuda Triangle is believed to be coincidental.

Exercise 2

Revise the sentences below by following the directions in parentheses. Write the new sentences on the lines.

6. It rained all morning. We went to the park. (Begin the second sentence with a transition word that introduces **contradiction**.)

7. The company wants to hire experienced employees. Those people with no experience need not apply. (Combine these sentences using a **cause and effect** transition word.)

8. Sylvia greeted all of her guests at the door. She seated them at the dinner table. (Combine these sentences using a transition word that shows **chronological order**.)

9. Bob Marley used Sly and Robbie for a rhythm section. Peter Tosh recorded with Sly and Robbie on at least one of his records. (Begin the second sentence with a transition word that shows **comparison and contrast**.)

10. We kept adding water to the paint. It was too thin to use. (Begin the second sentence with a transition word used for **concluding**.)

Pronouns as Linking Words

Parts of a paragraph can be linked in other ways besides using traditional transition words. Pronouns link words and sentences when they refer to a noun or another pronoun from a previous sentence.

Example

John left work early to go to a doctor's appointment. *He* is getting *his* annual physical. The pronouns *he* and *his* refer to the noun *John* from the first sentence. Without the first sentence, the reader would not know who *he* is. Therefore, the sentences are linked together by a pronoun. Pronouns can link entire pieces of writing together. Make sure, however, that if you use pronouns frequently in a piece of writing, they clearly refer to their antecedents. A string of unclear or ambiguous pronouns will confuse the reader.

Nouns as Linking Words

Nouns can serve as linking words when repeated from one sentence to another.

Example

The people of Philadelphia have great *pride* in their city. This *pride* comes from Philadelphia's long and glorious history as one of the seats of democracy in the United States.

Example

Everyone is very *excited* about our long weekend in the Poconos. Our *excitement* increased when the weather report called for snow.

_ Rephrasing as a Method of Linking

Words and ideas can also be rephrased and used again, as in the following sentences.

Example

Everyone in the band looks forward to the *State Jazz Band Finals*. This *annual conference* provides an opportunity for young musicians from all over California to play and listen to jazz together.

Linking Paragraphs

Repeating or rephrasing nouns and pronouns not only links sentences, but can be used to create transitions between paragraphs as well. To make a transition between paragraphs clear, follow the methods described above, making sure to repeat or rephrase the words from the last sentence of one paragraph in the first sentence of the next. This can successfully bridge the two paragraphs and connect ideas.

Example

Black bears consistently cause problems for companies that remove trash in Colorado. They break into both residential and commercial trash containers, leaving behind a mess and causing bears and humans to come into ever closer contact.

This issue prompted the development of bearproof trash containers. They have a self-locking lid that is heavy enough to close on its own, and can be bolted to a cement pad.