

Transitions Between Paragraphs

Sometimes an essay seems choppy, as if with each new topic sentence, the writer started the essay over again instead of connecting the paragraphs with effective transitions. As a writer, you need to know the purpose for each of your paragraphs and to show readers the relationships between them through different transition techniques.

Conjunctive Adverbs and Transitional Phrases

Conjunctive adverbs are individual words that can relate complete sentences (also known as independent clauses) or paragraphs to each other. Transitional phrases, on the other hand, are *sets of words* that show the relationship between sentences or paragraphs.

Together, they are called **transition expressions**. If used between independent clauses in a single sentence, there will be a semicolon between the clauses and a comma after the transition expression.

1. Several taxis roared past. **Meanwhile**, a little boy on the sidewalk dropped his ice cream cone. (conjunctive adverb)
2. Several taxis roared past; **however**, none of them stopped for me. (conjunctive adverb)
3. Several taxis roared past; none of them, **in spite of** my outstretched arm, stopped for me. (transitional phrase)

See Appendix in this guide for more example transition words and phrases.

Repeated Words or Phrases, Use of Synonyms or Pronouns

Another way to show the relationships between sentences or paragraphs is to use repetition of ideas through synonyms and pronouns. If you start writing on the topic of hiding something, for example, you might use synonyms like *conceal*, *concealing*, *hidden*, or *camouflage* to continue that idea in later sentences or paragraphs. Likewise, if you mention a

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person, the next related sentences may use pronouns, such as *they*, *she*, or *he*, or a descriptive phrase to continue to talk about that same person. For example:

The character Dr. Gregory House in the TV show *House, M.D.* is often described as “antisocial.” While **the grouchy doctor** doesn’t generally attack or kill people, as the term indicates, **he** does verbally abuse almost everyone he meets.

Pronouns, however, are not usually effective transition words between paragraphs, so be sure to clearly name all nouns in a topic sentence.

Paragraph Transitions

Smooth paragraph transitions help readers move from the last paragraph’s discussion to a new paragraph’s ideas. Making the task harder, teachers sometimes stop student writers from using conjunctive adverbs such as *however*, *therefore*, and *thus* in essay assignments. (The reason they do that is to try to get you to be more expressive about the relationships between your sentences and paragraphs.) To use a mere word like *however* between paragraphs gives readers only a fraction of the connection between the previous paragraph’s ideas and the new paragraph’s topic. Of course, *however* tells readers very directly that the new paragraph is in contrast to the previous paragraph’s statements, but that’s all it says; *however* is a pretty limited word. To make your writing communicate more smoothly, each new paragraph should build on what was said before in a way that both develops new ideas and is hardly noticeable.

To build an effective paragraph transition, a writer must show the reasons that one paragraph comes after another, just as a sentence can usually make sense only because of the sentence before it. Imagine how confused you’d be if the following first sentence weren’t said:

Eating a tart cherry pie has always made my mouth salivate.
Sometimes I drool so much that red juice runs down my chin.
A waitperson at a restaurant even remarked to me once that I
appeared to be in a pie-eating contest with myself.

The first sentence is the topic for the paragraph and has a cause-effect relationship to the next two statements. Words and ideas reoccur to help connect the sentences: the first and second

sentences use the synonyms *salivate* and *drool*; the characteristic red color of cherries mentioned in the second sentence connects it to the first; and the last sentence connects to both the topic sentence by repeating the word *pie* and to the second sentence with the idea of being messy. These synonyms, repetitions, and related ideas help to create **paragraph cohesion**. The first step in making an essay flow better is having sentences that relate well inside a paragraph. The next step is relating paragraphs to each other like sentences.

The previous example paragraph ended with a stranger (the waitperson) making a comment about the sloppiness of the writer. Now I want to start a new paragraph. In general, a new paragraph is started when a different topic, time, or place is discussed, so right away the reader will expect something different—but **related**—when a new paragraph begins:

. . . **A waitperson** at a restaurant even **remarked** to me once that I appeared to be in a pie-eating contest with myself.

In fact, I frequently find myself the recipient of **personal comments** bestowed by **strangers** who may imagine they are being helpful, or at least funny. I always try to have a sense of humor about myself, but *self*-deprecating humor of my choosing is my preferred way to connect with others. Suddenly having **an unfamiliar person** leap out and make **a joke at my expense** only pains my too-thin skin.

The second paragraph becomes a broader discussion of the type of behavior the author has experienced from strangers in general. The new paragraph's topic sentence refers back to an unfamiliar person's humorous actions but its purpose is to expand the scope of the topic to include the effects of this type of situation. Though the second paragraph has a new focus, it begins by rewording and building on the ideas of the previous paragraph in order to carry the reader toward a new area of thought.

When a paragraph reaches its conclusion, arriving at a meaningful point about the topic, it's often better to simply finish the paragraph than to try to lead the reader to the next one with some phrase or foreshadowing. Start the new paragraph with a transition technique that is appropriate to your purposes, demonstrates the relationship between the paragraphs, and shows flexibility. Above all, be subtle: the best paragraph transitions are the ones the reader doesn't even notice!

Appendix

The following table shows subordinating conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, and transitional phrases that indicate certain types of relationships.

Subordinators		Conjunctive Adverbs / Transitional Phrases			
To add or show sequence					
		again	also	besides	equally important
		finally	first, second	further	furthermore
		in addition	in the first place	last	moreover
		next	still	then	too
To compare					
as	as if	also	similarly	likewise	in the same way
as though	just as				
so... as					
To contrast					
although	despite	but at the same time	even so	for all that	however
even though	than	in contrast	in spite of	nevertheless	notwithstanding
though		on the contrary	on the other hand	regardless	still
To provide examples or intensify					
		after all	an illustration of	another/ one example is	even
		for example	for instance	in fact	in particular
		indeed	it is true	of course	specifically
		that is	to illustrate	truly	
To indicate place					
where	wherever	above	adjacent to	atop	below
		beyond	close	elsewhere	farther/ farther on
		here	in	near	nearby
		north, south, east, west	on	on the other side	opposite
		over	there	to the left/ right	
To indicate time					
as	as long as	after a while	afterward	at last	at length
as soon as	after	at that time	before	earlier	formerly
before	now that	immediately	in the meantime	in the past	lately
once	since	later	meanwhile	now	once
until	when	presently	shortly	simultaneously	so far
whenever	while	soon	subsequently	then	thereafter

Subordinators		Conjunctive Adverbs / Transitional Phrases			
To show cause or effect					
as as long as inasmuch as	because since	accordingly hence thereupon	as a result otherwise thus	consequently then to this end	for this purpose therefore with this object
To give additional information or support					
		additionally furthermore moreover too	again in addition to more so	also in the first place next	equally important incidentally otherwise
To indicate chronology or order					
after before since when while	as once until whence	afterward finally in the meantime next subsequently	at last first, second later now then	during formerly meanwhile once thereafter	earlier immediately never shortly
To show logic					
because since	if	also for this reason then	as a result hence therefore	because of however thus	consequently otherwise
To repeat, summarize, or conclude					
		all in all in brief in particular on the whole to close	altogether in closing in short that is to put it differently	as has been said in conclusion in simpler terms then to sum up	finally in other words in summary therefore to summarize
To concede					
although if whereas	even though though while				
To show conditions					
as long as in case provided that	if inasmuch as unless	On the condition that			
To show purpose					
in order that so that	lest that				