

Transitions



Transitions are words and phrases that connect and show relationships between ideas in a piece of writing. Transitions also help the reader more easily follow the writer's train of thought and enhance the clarity of the ideas. Without transitions, it can be difficult to follow the flow of ideas from paragraph to paragraph and from sentence to sentence. This handout explores a few of the ways you can use and choose transitions in your writing.

Using Transitions

Transitions belong between

- **Sections** (dividing the major ideas or topics of the writing)
- **Paragraphs** (dividing the minor ideas of the writing)
- **Sentences** (showing relationships between them)
- **Parts of sentences** (indicating how phrases connect)

Transitions should refer to the previous idea while still moving the reader on to the next, thereby showing the relationship between the two ideas. Writing—especially non-fiction as the example below shows—usually lacks clarity without transitions at these levels. While the purpose of this handout is to encourage transitions at all of these levels, the example below focuses on the paragraph and sentence levels.

Examples of Transitions

The following paragraphs have the same information. The first, however, has no transitional words or phrases to give the reader an idea of how the individual facts fit together. Compare the two versions to see how much sense they make.

Without transitions: Experiments show that important tasks can be accomplished with a hand axe. *Homo erectus* possessed other tools suitable for some purposes. The hand axe was costly to produce in terms of time, labor, and skill, and required larger blocks of fine-grained, faultless stone. Flint and basalt are fine-grained, faultless stones. The hand axe presented a hazard.

With transitions (in bold): Experiments show that **this** important task can be accomplished with a hand axe. **But** *Homo erectus* possessed other tools suitable for that purpose. **Compared with these**, the hand axe was costly to produce in terms of time, labor, and skill, and required larger blocks of fine-grained, faultless stone, **such as** flint or basalt. The hand axe **also** presented a hazard.

This is an exaggerated example; most paragraphs don't need this many transitions. In fact, writing can become overdosed with transitions. But the original version of this paragraph (with transitions) is supposed to demonstrate why *Homo erectus* didn't use a hand axe. This purpose does not come across in the example without transitions, which seems like a series of factual statements that are unconnected. The transitional words and phrases in the second example, consequently, show how these factual statements fit together.

In the example with transitions,

- *This* connects the reader to whatever "task" was being discussed earlier in the text.
- *But* lets the reader know that we are contrasting other tools with the hand ax.
- *Compared with these* introduces a contrast between the hand ax and other tools.
- *Such as* shows that flint and basalt are examples of a certain kind of stone.
- *Also* indicates that the information in this sentence is additional.

Kinds of Transitions

The bold-face categories below are divided according to the function of each word or phrase. Also, since transitions are more of a way of thinking than a limited list of words, many other words not on this list can serve as transitions.

Addition	Chronology	Result	Summary
Again	Afterward	And	Finally
Also	Before	As well	Generally
Another	During	Besides	In brief
In addition	Earlier	Accordingly	In conclusion
Moreover	First	As a result	In other words
Too	Immediately	Consequently	In short
	Meanwhile	For this reason	In summary
Similarity	Next	So	On the whole
Accordingly	Second	Then	That is
Also	Simultaneously	Therefore	Therefore
Comparatively	Soon	Thereupon	To sum up
Likewise	Still	Thus	
Moreover	Then	Because	General
Similarly	While	Since	Admittedly
			Assuredly
Difference	Location	Example	Granted
Although	Above	For example	To be sure
But	Below	For instance	At this level
Conversely	Beyond	In fact	Basically
However	Farther	Namely	Certainly
In contrast	Further	Specifically	Generally speaking
Nevertheless	Here	Further	In other words
On the contrary	Nearby	Furthermore	In this situation
On the other hand	Opposite	In addition	Indeed
Yet	There	Such as	Certainly
	To the left/right	To illustrate	Surely