

The Concept: Connecting Ideas Using Transitions

What?

When communicating a succession of ideas, you make connections among them by using transitions. Transitions are words, phrases, or sentences used to signal relationships between ideas. They connect words and phrases together in a sentence, or they link paragraphs in a longer work. Conjunctions are types of transitions that signal relationships among words, phrases, or clauses in a sentence.

When?

When writing an analysis, argument, expository, or narrative work, whether it is a multiparagraph response or longer essay, you use transitions to connect ideas. You also use transitions when speaking and presenting. Any time you introduce a thesis or claim and support it with evidence and examples, you need to establish a line of reasoning between your analysis and these examples. Transitions help you make connections between these ideas. When your audience reads transition words, they can follow an argument or a line of thought. Without transitions, your ideas and evidence may appear isolated and disconnected.

Why?

Transitions help you create logic and coherence when writing and speaking. They show how ideas relate and help readers understand your purpose or logic. Transitions also help you expand your sentences from simpler ones to more effective and complex ones. Conjunctions, in particular, will help you vary your sentence structure to make your ideas and writing more interesting and coherent for your audience.

The Process: Using Transitions to Connect Ideas

To incorporate transitions into your work, do the following:

1. Start with two or more ideas that are clearly stated. You can also identify textual details—direct quotes or paraphrases—that you can use as evidence. If in an earlier stage of writing, you may rely on a Reading Closely Tool or **Forming Evidence-Based Claims Tool** in which you have written down comments about how evidence relates to a guiding question.
2. Determine the relationship among the ideas or textual details. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - a. Do these ideas or details reflect a cause-and-effect relationship?
 - b. Do these ideas or details reflect a sequence of events or steps?
 - c. Do these ideas or details reflect a special set of circumstances (e.g., an exception to a general rule or set of expectations)?
 - d. Do these details provide important evidence for a claim?
 - e. Is one of these ideas being added to another? Is one idea being used as an example of the other?
 - f. Are you trying to show that the ideas are similar or different? Are you clarifying your thinking?
3. Once you have determined the relationship among your ideas and details, choose the right transition words. The resource below can help you choose an appropriate transition for the purpose of your writing. Remember that the transition is signaling a relationship, so be sure to select the appropriate transition and place it in the sentence or paragraph accordingly with the correct punctuation.

Literacy Toolbox: Tools and Resources to Support Using Transitions to Connect Ideas

Tools

Access and use the following graphic organizers, found in the Literacy Toolbox, to help you use transitions. You can use the observations, claims, and textual details you have noted on these tools to develop your written product.

Reading Closely Tools

Use the **Attending to Details Tool**, **Analyzing Relationships Tool**, **Evaluating Ideas Tool**, or **Extending Understanding Tool** to note important details and make initial observations about a text. You can use transitions to make connections between textual details and how they relate to your ideas.

Forming Evidence-Based Claims Tool

Use this tool to identify related and significant details from the text. Use transition words to make connections among those details and to write a text-based claim based on those details.

Note-Taking Tools

Use annotations and quotes from your Note-Taking Tools as supporting evidence for your product. Use transition words to make connections among those details and to your claims.

Organizing Evidence Tool

Use this tool to organize the explanation and evidence for your central claim, or thesis. Think about how to use transitions among your supporting claims, counterclaims, ideas, and evidence. You can also use transitions to make connections between supporting claims and your thesis or central claim.

Argument and Comparison Organizational Frames

Use these tools to plan an argument or comparative essay. Think about how to use transitions as you introduce the evidence and summaries you have noted on the tool in fuller paragraphs.

Resources

Transitions

This chart can be helpful when you are connecting ideas as you are writing. It gives you examples of different transition words to use based on your writing purpose.

Conventions Resource Guide

You can use this resource to identify and use symbols, such as the colon and em-dash, to aid or emphasize ideas and the connections among them.

Style Resource Guide

This resource can help integrate transitions correctly into sentence structures to create a certain effect or emphasis.

Transition Words and Phrases

The following table organizes transitions by the various reasons writers make the connections. Think of your own writing purposes and goals to locate appropriate transition words, conjunctions, and phrases to help you establish coherent, expressive sentences and paragraphs. Consult the examples given here, but also take note of examples as you read texts and add them in your Mentor Sentence Journal.

Purpose of Connection	Transition Words and Phrases	Examples in Writing
Adding to or emphasizing ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • and • as well as • also • in addition • additionally • furthermore • moreover • not only...but also... • especially 	<p><i>All this while, Hester had been looking steadily at the old man, and was shocked, as well as wonder-smitten, to discern what a change had been wrought upon him within the past seven years. (Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>)</i></p> <p><i>Cape Cod lies at the other end of the world from Sicily not only in distance, but in the look of it, the lay of it, the way of it. (Hamilton Wright Mabie, "Theocritus on Cape Cod")</i></p>
Providing examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in particular • specifically • such as • including • in fact • for example • for instance • to illustrate • to demonstrate 	<p><i>Mr. Freeland had many of the faults peculiar to slaveholders, such as being very passionate and fretful. (Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i>)</i></p> <p><i>In looking over any collection of American poetry, for instance, one is struck with the fact that it is not so much faulty as inadequate. (Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Americanism in Literature")</i></p>
Repeating or clarifying ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in other words • similarly • in the same way • equally • likewise • again 	<p><i>It was a little state, the union, a minlature Republic; Its Affairs Were Every Man's Affairs, and every man had a real say about them. In other words, in the union Jurgis learned to talk politics. (Sinclair, <i>The Jungle</i>)</i></p>
Comparing similar ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • similarly • in the same way • in like manner • in similar fashion • likewise • besides 	<p><i>In the same way he mentions a couple of spendthrifts of Padua and Siena, who come to violent ends, just as in the preceding canto he had dwelt upon the tortures undergone by Dionysius and Simon de Montfort, guarded by Nessus and his fellow centaurs. (Theodore Roosevelt, "Dante and the Bowery")</i></p>

Purpose of Connection	Transition Words and Phrases	Examples in Writing
Contrasting ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • but • however • yet • although • even though • while • whereas • unlike • on the other hand • despite • in spite of • instead • actually • nevertheless • nonetheless • conversely • still • notwithstanding • regardless • otherwise • on the contrary • in contrast 	<p><i>It was a remarkable quality of the Ghost (which Scrooge had observed at the baker's), that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease. (Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol)</i></p> <p><i>I would not have it imagined, however, that he was one of those cruel potentates of the school who joy in the [pain] of their subjects; on the contrary, he administered justice with discrimination rather than severity. (Washington Irving, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow)</i></p> <p><i>There were many limitations attached to the powers thus granted, and the organization was made permanent. Nevertheless, the Senate defeated the bill, and a new conference committee was appointed. (W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk)</i></p>
Sequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initially • first of all • at first • in the first place • in the second place • secondly, lastly, etc. • then • subsequently • next • before • previously • after • afterward • until • at present • eventually • at last • finally • in the end 	<p><i>Such higher training-schools tended naturally to deepen broader development: at first they were common and grammar schools, then some became high schools. And finally, by 1900, some thirty-four had one year or more of studies of college grade. (W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk)</i></p> <p><i>That's so. They tried to force it, but couldn't. And, in the end, they must have got it unlocked somehow or other. (Christie, Poirot Investigates)</i></p> <p><i>Men are also representative; first, of things, and secondly, of ideas. (Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Uses of Great Men")</i></p>

Purpose of Connection	Transition Words and Phrases	Examples in Writing
Cause and effect (give a reason)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • because • owing to the fact that • due to the fact that • since • in that • as 	<p><i>I was compelled to deliver every cent of that money to Master Hugh. And why? Not because he earned it,—not because he had any hand in earning it,—not because I owed it to him,—nor because he possessed the slightest shadow of a right to it; but solely because he had the power to compel me to give it up. (Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave)</i></p>
Cause and effect (give a result)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • so • therefore • thus • hence • as a result • consequently • as a consequence • for this reason • on account of • accordingly 	<p><i>Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, consequently, when the Bell struck One, and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. (Dickens, A Christmas Carol)</i></p> <p><i>The next day she laid the affair before Mr. Brocklehurst, who said that Mrs. Reed must be written to, as she was my natural guardian. A note was accordingly addressed to that lady, who returned for answer, that “I might do as I pleased: she had long relinquished all interference in my affairs.” (Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre)</i></p>
Specify certain conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unless • either, or • neither, nor • or • nor • when • so long as • if...then • in the event that • given that • provided that • even if • only if • on the condition • in case • almost • nearly • probably • always • frequently 	<p><i>They are given to all kinds of marvelous beliefs, are subject to trances and visions, and frequently see strange sights, and hear music and voices in the air. (Washington Irving, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow)</i></p> <p><i>I never was much of a hand to argue, even if I had the strength for it. (Mary Hallock Foote, Friend Barton’s ‘Concern’)</i></p> <p><i>[Y]ou shall not be left desolate, so long as I live. (Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre)</i></p> <p><i>“On this arm, I have neither hand nor nails.” (Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre)</i></p> <p><i>[A]ll I said or did seemed either to console or revive him. (Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre)</i></p>