

## Transitions

Transitions help readers to see relationships between ideas. Needed between sentences and paragraphs, transitions guide the reader from one point to the next. Transitions are **two-faced**, looking backward to an idea you just discussed, and looking forward to the next point you are about to make. They tell the reader what you discussed, and what you're about to discuss and how those ideas relate. Serving a stylistic purpose, transitions provide a smooth flow to writing by generating cohesion among different parts. Performing a key rhetorical function, they emphasize key points and prepare readers for upcoming ideas.

Transitions are very difficult to create since they require a writer to be in control of multiple parts of a composition, but for this very reason, transitions are very revealing about the quality of writing. An obvious sign of composition clarity, unity, and organization, a thoughtful transition shows readers and teachers how well you write, for in order to create an effective transition, writers must be able to describe what they just talked about and introduce what they are about to discuss all while clearly indicating the relationship between those two parts of the composition. It's not easy to make an effective transition, but when you do create a good one, the writing on both sides of the transition benefits.

**Transition Formula:** The conventional way to create an effective transition between paragraphs is to use a transitional word/phrase + the main idea of the previous paragraph/sentence + the main idea of the current paragraph/sentence.

In this way, if readers looked only at the transition, they should be able to deduce what you just talked about and what you're going to discuss.

Example: While Jones isn't the friendliest person, she is honest.

- Note the three-part structure: transitional word/phrase (while, which signals a change is coming) + main idea of previous sentence/paragraph (Jones unfriendly) + main idea of current paragraph (Jones honest).

Broadly speaking, transitions function in three ways: (1) they show that you're **continuing or adding** to the direction of your sentence/idea, (2) they show that you're **emphasizing** your ideas, or (3) they indicate that you're **changing** the direction of your ideas.

Common Transitions

Continue the direction	Emphasize	Change the direction
In addition Moreover Also Furthermore Therefore Thus For example	Indeed In fact Certainly Clearly Undeniably	Still Instead Although While However Meanwhile In contrast

Continue the direction	Emphasize	Change the direction
Consequently As a result Similarly Likewise		Nevertheless Usually Normally But Once Now

### Transition Tips

1. Not every sentence or paragraph needs a transitional word/phrase. You can transition in other ways, especially by repeating ideas and finding words that resonate with the words/ideas in neighboring sentences and paragraphs.
2. Most writers place transitions in the first sentence of the next paragraph. Consider using transitions in the last sentence of a paragraph, which may very well create better flow.
3. Do NOT rely on bald transitional words/phrases to begin a new paragraph. Don't merely write *in addition*, *however*, etc; instead, use the transitional word/phrase + repetition of previous idea + introduction of new idea formula.
  - Example: In addition to serving honorably as police commissioner, Teddy Roosevelt earned public respect for his work as governor. [Note how the transitional phrase (In addition) establishes a relationship between a previously discussed idea (honorable service as police service) and a new idea (earned respect as governor).

### Exercise on Transitions between Sentences

Directions: Choose the word that creates the most effective transition within and between sentences.

1. In most cases, she does what she's asked. In this case, \_\_\_\_\_, she did not.
  - A. therefore
  - B. consequently
  - C. similarly
  - D. however
2. The scientist discovered that some of the experiments were flawed. \_\_\_\_\_, she believed that the experiments did have some value.
  - A. Nevertheless
  - B. Moreover
  - C. For example
  - D. In addition
3. He is a poor dribbler, erratic shooter, and soft defender. \_\_\_\_\_, he is the team's most skillful basketball player.
  - A. In fact
  - B. Instead
  - C. Still

- D. Meanwhile
4. During the first four days, it rained while we vacationed in Florida. For the final three days, \_\_\_\_\_, it was hot and dry.
- A. thus
  - B. in contrast
  - C. for example
  - D. consequently
5. The author makes a compelling case for the way to create jobs. She \_\_\_\_\_ demonstrates how to strengthen American foreign policy.
- A. therefore
  - B. in fact
  - C. also
  - D. usually
6. There are several instances in which a writer should use a semicolon. \_\_\_\_\_, one could place a semicolon between two very closely related independent clauses.
- A. For example
  - B. Likewise
  - C. Thus
  - D. Consequently
7. \_\_\_\_\_ I entered the classroom late, I asked the student next to me what I had missed.
- A. After
  - B. Although
  - C. Meanwhile
  - D. Indeed
8. \_\_\_\_\_ it's perfectly acceptable to place transitions at the beginning of a paragraph, the end of a paragraph is also a suitable place for a transition.
- A. Since
  - B. Moreover
  - C. Because
  - D. Although
9. When I was fourteen, I took a job at an ice cream shop to help my parents pay the bills. \_\_\_\_\_, I would help with the chores whenever I was asked.
- A. Consequently
  - B. Moreover
  - C. Therefore
  - D. Moreover
10. \_\_\_\_\_ I finish my work on time. Today, I didn't.
- A. Now
  - B. Usually

- C. In fact
- D. In contrast

### Exercise on Transitions between Paragraphs

Directions: Each of the questions contains the end of a paragraph and the beginning of the next paragraph. Choose the answer that most accurately evaluates the bolded transitions between paragraphs.

1. The Superiority Theory of laughter is right in asserting that people laugh at others' misfortune. Some of us truly do enjoy it when we escape ridicule and when foolish people get what they deserve: humiliation that comes from derisive laughter. Clearly we laugh out of a sense of superiority over those who are the target of humor, but that isn't the only reason we laugh: sometimes we laugh out of a sense of relief, as we often do when we are in tense situations.
2. The Relief Theory proposes that people laugh as a result of releasing excess nervous energy that accumulates during stressful moments.
  - A. The bolded transitional sentence is effective because it highlights the current idea and introduces the new idea on the Relief Theory with words that resonate with each other.
  - B. The bolded transitional sentence is ineffective because transitions should only be at the beginning of a paragraph, and this one is at the end of a paragraph.
3. The "silent member" of the Continental Congress, Thomas Jefferson used his pen to advocate for individual liberty and against strong, centralized government. The Declaration of Independence, which he drafted when he was 33 years old, is, perhaps, his greatest written achievement.

In addition, Jefferson was a brilliant architect, who designed a masterful home atop Monticello and much of the University of Virginia, including the rotunda.

- A. The transitional sentence is effective because of its reliance upon a useful transitional phrase that clearly establishes the relationship between the two paragraphs.
  - B. The transitional sentence is ineffective because it relies on a bald transition that does not clearly establish how the second paragraph relates to and builds upon the first.
4. She didn't feel joy on her wedding day. Nothing registered in her heart when her first child was born.

She hadn't felt anything, in fact, since that autumn day when they consoled each other under a birch tree in the park.

On a wooden bench beneath a canopy of ruddy birch leaves, he clasped her hands while a tear drop plodded down her face.

- A. The transitional sentence is effective because much of its language resonates with and anticipates the language in the ensuing paragraph.
  - B. The transitional sentence is ineffective because it doesn't flow smoothly into the next paragraph.
5. The American experiment in self-government nearly died in its cradle. Without ratification of the Constitution by nine of the original states, the United States may have died in its infancy. Convincing nine states to adopt the Constitution was not easy. Ten months of written and oral debate between Federalists (supporters of the new Constitution) and Anti-Federalists (those opposed) seized the fledgling nation's attention, but no arguments were as eloquent or as persuasive as those that came to be known as The Federalist Papers.

Written under the pseudonym Publius by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, The Federalist Papers is considered the most accurate commentary on the intentions of the founders and among the most insightful documents about the debates between Federalists and Anti-Federalists.

- A. The transitional sentence is ineffective because of its failure to employ a useful transitional word and failure to convey the relationship between the ideas in each paragraph.
  - B. The transitional sentence coherently links ideas between each paragraph through its use of repetitious language and logical flow of ideas.
6. 19th and early 20th-century doctors who sought to cure cancer often failed because of their misunderstanding of cancer's behavior and their inability to detect its movements. William Halsted's belief that surgery could cure breast cancer led him and his disciples on a brutal quest to cut out as much of the chest and surrounding areas as possible in order to prevent the spread of cancer. His mastectomies were disfiguring and highly ineffective, for he did not understand that the cancer may have spread beyond the area he had removed long before his life-threatening surgeries.

Nevertheless, surgery wasn't as horrible as it had been, especially because of the use of anesthesia and insistence upon sterilizing tools and wounds.

- A. The transitional effectively links the ideas between paragraphs.
- B. The transition effectively links the ideas between paragraphs by using words that reiterate the main idea of the previous paragraph and introduce the main idea of the current paragraph.