

# Transitions

## What this handout is about

Transitions glue our ideas and our essays together. This handout will introduce you to some useful transitional expressions and help you employ them effectively.

## The function and importance of transitions

In both academic writing and professional writing, your goal is to convey information clearly and concisely, if not to convert the reader to your way of thinking. Transitions help you to achieve these goals by establishing logical connections between sentences, paragraphs, and sections of your papers. In other words, transitions tell readers what to do with the information you present to them. Whether single words, quick phrases, or full sentences, they function as signs that tell readers how to think about, organize, and react to old and new ideas as they read through what you have written.

Transitions signal relationships between ideas—relationships such as: “Another example coming up—stay alert!” or “Here’s an exception to my previous statement” or “Although this idea appears to be true, here’s the real story.” Basically, transitions provide the reader with directions for how to piece together your ideas into a logically coherent argument. Transitions are not just verbal decorations that embellish your paper by making it sound or read better. They are words with particular meanings that tell the reader to think and react in a particular way to your ideas. In providing the reader with these important cues, transitions help readers understand the logic of how your ideas fit together.

## Signs that you might need to work on your transitions

How can you tell whether you need to work on your transitions? **Here are some possible clues:**

- Your instructor has written comments like “choppy,” “jumpy,” “abrupt,” “flow,” “need signposts,” or “how is this related?” on your papers.
- Your readers (instructors, friends, or classmates) tell you that they had trouble following your organization or train of thought.
- You tend to write the way you think—and your brain often jumps from one idea to another pretty quickly.
- You wrote your paper in several discrete “chunks” and then pasted them together.
- You are working on a group paper; the draft you are working on was created by pasting pieces of several people’s writing together.

## Organization

Since the clarity and effectiveness of your transitions will depend greatly on how well you have organized your paper, you may want to evaluate your paper’s organization before you work on transitions. In the margins of your draft, summarize in a word or short phrase what each paragraph is

about or how it fits into your analysis as a whole. This exercise should help you to see the order of and connection between your ideas more clearly.

If after doing this exercise you find that you still have difficulty linking your ideas together in a coherent fashion, your problem may not be with transitions but with organization.

## Types of transitions

The types of transitions available to you are as diverse as the circumstances in which you need to use them. A transition can be a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire paragraph. In each case, it functions the same way: First, the transition either directly summarizes the content of a preceding sentence, paragraph, or section or implies such a summary (by reminding the reader of what has come before). Then, it helps the reader anticipate or comprehend the new information that you wish to present.

1. **Transitions between sections:** Particularly in longer works, it may be necessary to include transitional paragraphs that summarize for the reader the information just covered and specify the relevance of this information to the discussion in the following section.
2. **Transitions between paragraphs:** If you have done a good job of arranging paragraphs so that the content of one leads logically to the next, the transition will highlight a relationship that already exists by summarizing the previous paragraph and suggesting something of the content of the paragraph that follows. A transition between paragraphs can be a word or two (however, for example, similarly), a phrase, or a sentence. Transitions can be at the end of the first paragraph, at the beginning of the second paragraph, or in both places.
3. **Transitions within paragraphs:** As with transitions between sections and paragraphs, transitions within paragraphs act as cues by helping readers to anticipate what is coming before they read it. Within paragraphs, transitions tend to be single words or short phrases.

## Transitional expressions

Effectively constructing each transition often depends upon your ability to identify words or phrases that will indicate for the reader the kind of logical relationships you want to convey. The table below should make it easier for you to find these words or phrases. Whenever you have trouble finding a word, phrase, or sentence to serve as an effective transition, refer to the information in the table for assistance. Look in the left column of the table for the kind of logical relationship you are trying to express. Then look in the right column of the table for examples of words or phrases that express this logical relationship.

Keep in mind that each of these words or phrases may have a slightly different meaning. Consult a dictionary or writer's handbook if you are unsure of the exact meaning of a word or phrase.

LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP	TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSION
Similarity	also, in the same way, just as ... so too, likewise, similarly

<b>Exception/Contrast</b>	but, however, in spite of, on the one hand ... on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, in contrast, on the contrary, still, yet
<b>Sequence/Order</b>	first, second, third, ... next, then, finally
<b>Time</b>	after, afterward, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, immediately, later, meanwhile, now, recently, simultaneously, subsequently, then
<b>Example</b>	for example, for instance, namely, specifically, to illustrate
<b>Emphasis</b>	even, indeed, in fact, of course, truly
<b>Place/Position</b>	above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there
<b>Cause and Effect</b>	accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus
<b>Additional Support or Evidence</b>	additionally, again, also, and, as well, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then
<b>Conclusion/Summary</b>	finally, in a word, in brief, briefly, in conclusion, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, thus, to conclude, to summarize, in sum, to sum up, in summary

## Works Consulted:

“Tips & Tools.” Writing Center, [writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/](http://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/).