

Transitions



What do transitions do?

Transitions are used to show a relationship between ideas. This is what people often mean when they talk about "flow"—the feeling that ideas in a paper are linked and move from one to the other with purpose. In this way, making use of transitions and organizing your paper are related in an important way. If you have carefully organized your thoughts in your paper, your transitions should make sense and your ideas should fit well together.

While individual transitional phrases are great tools, they can't do all the work on their own. The ideas need to fit together well in order for such words or phrases to make sense. In other words, a transition *signals* that you are making a transition in thought—it doesn't create the transition by itself.

Some things transitional words or phrases can do:

- **Build upon a previous idea**

You can use this strategy to complicate something that has already been stated or help guide your audience through what is most important in a given idea.

"**Furthermore**, dogs are furry in addition to being smart, making them the best animal."

- **Show a contrast between ideas**

"**Although** Jacobs claims that *Hamlet* fails as a play, Simmons argues that it is one of the best spectacles of theatre to grace the stage."

- **Illustrate how you are situating/reacting to another's ideas**

"**While** Johnson's theory is applicable in many cases, his ideas fall short when considering the postcolonial atmosphere of India."

- **Offer an example**

"*The King's Speech*, **for example**, explores some of the complexities of inheriting the crown."

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- **Signal a conclusion you are drawing or claim you are making**
Using transitions to signal a claim is a great way to let your reader know when you are adding your own thoughts to the discussion.
"Smith claims that the goal of poetry is to examine the human condition.
Therefore, we can read 'The Flea' as a discussion of the struggle between pleasure and morality."
- **Act as signposts for your reader so she/he can keep track of the organization of your argument**
"**Finally**, I will address the symbolism in 'The Road Not Taken.'"

There are of course hundreds of phrases and words that can be used to transition, but what is important to consider is the relationship between ideas that you want to establish.

What are some useful strategies for creating effective transitions?

Here are some tips to determine if your paper has "flow" and if your transitions are working well.

- **Highlight or circle the transitional words or phrases you are currently using the draft.**
This will let you hone in on your transitions specifically and see if the ones you're using work for what you want to accomplish. This strategy will also help you determine if there are places in the draft that need a transition but don't have one yet.
- **Try a reverse outline.**
This is when you go through your working draft and make an outline from what you see to be the main points of each paragraph. This will let you see if your ideas are fitting together in the way you'd like and if your transitions are doing the work you need them to do.
- Since transitions are used to help guide a reader through your thoughts, it is always helpful to **have another pair of eyes read through your draft** and provide feedback.