

Transitions Between Paragraphs

Sometimes an essay seems choppy, as if the writer started over again with each new paragraph instead of connecting them. As a writer, you need to know the purpose for each of your paragraphs and to show readers the relationships between them through different transition techniques, but a transition expression is not necessary in every topic sentence.

Conjunctive Adverbs and Transitional Phrases

Conjunctive adverbs are individual words that can relate complete sentences (also known as independent clauses) or paragraphs to each other. Transitional phrases, on the other hand, are *sets of words* that show the relationship between sentences or paragraphs. Together, they are called transition expressions. If used between independent clauses in a single sentence, there will be a semicolon between the clauses and a comma after the transition expression.

1. Several taxis roared past; Meanwhile, a little boy dropped his ice cream cone. (conjunctive adverb)
2. Several taxis roared past; however, none of them stopped for me. (conjunctive adverb)
3. Several taxis roared past; none of them, in spite of my outstretched arm, stopped for me. (transitional expression)

See Appendix for more example transition words and phrases.

Repeated Words or Phrases, Use of Synonyms or Pronouns

Another way to show the relationships between sentences or paragraphs is to use repetition through synonyms and pronouns. If you start writing on the topic of hiding something, for example, you might use synonyms like *conceal*, *concealing*, *hidden*, or *camouflage* to continue that idea in later sentences or paragraphs. Likewise, if you mention a character, the next related sentences may use pronouns, such as *she* or *he*, or a descriptive phrase to continue to talk about that same person:

The character Dr. Gregory House in the TV show *House, M.D.* is often described as "antisocial." While he doesn't generally attack or kill people, as the term indicates, the grouchy doctor does verbally abuse almost everyone he meets.

Paragraph Segues

Smooth paragraph transitions help readers move from the last paragraph's discussion to a new paragraph's ideas. Making the task harder, teachers sometimes stop student writers from using conjunctive adverbs such as *however*, *therefore*, and *thus* in essay assignments. (The reason

they do that is to try to get you to be more expressive about the relationships between your sentences and paragraphs.) To use a mere word like *however* between paragraphs gives readers only a fraction of the connection between the previous paragraph's ideas and the new paragraph's topic. Of course, *however* tells readers very directly that the new paragraph is in contrast to the previous paragraph's statements, but that's all it says. Readers want a new paragraph to build on what was said before and to do it in a way that both develops new ideas and is hardly noticeable.

To build an effective paragraph transition, a writer has to show the reason that one paragraph comes after another, just as a sentence can usually make sense only because of the sentence before it. (Imagine how confused you'd be if the following first sentence weren't said):

Eating a tart cherry pie has always made my cheeks salivate.
Sometimes I drool so much that red juice runs down my chin. A
waitperson at a restaurant even remarked to me once that I
appeared to be in a pie-eating contest with myself.

What words and ideas reoccur to connect the sentences? The first and second sentences use the synonyms *salivate* and *drool*. The characteristic red color of cherries mentioned in the second sentence connects it to the first. The last sentence connects to the topic sentence by repeating the word *pie*, and it connects with the second sentence with the idea of being messy. These synonyms, repetitions, and common ideas help to create paragraph cohesion.

The paragraph left off with a stranger making a comment about how sloppy a pie-eater this first-person-singular "I" is. In general, a new paragraph is started when a different topic, time, or place is being discussed, so right away the reader will expect something different—but related—to be discussed when a new paragraph begins:

. . . A waitperson at a restaurant even remarked to me once that I appeared to be in a pie-eating contest with myself.
I frequently find myself the recipient of personal comments bestowed by strangers who may imagine they are being helpful or at least funny. I always try to have a sense of humor and humility about myself, but self-deprecating humor is my preferred way to connect with others. Suddenly having a person leap out and make a joke at my expense only pains my all-too-thin skin.

The second paragraph becomes a broader discussion of the type of behavior the author has experienced from strangers. The new paragraph's topic sentence refers back to an unfamiliar person's humorous actions but its purpose is to expand the scope of the topic to include the effects of this type of situation. Though the second paragraph has a new focus, it first rewords and builds on the ideas of the previous paragraph in order to carry the reader toward a new area of thought.

Appendix

The following table shows subordinating conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, and transitional phrases that indicate certain types of relationships.

Subordinators	Conjunctive Adverbs / Transitional Phrases				
To add or show sequence					
	again	also	besides	equally important	
	finally	first, second	further	furthermore	
	in addition	in the first place	last	moreover	
	next	still	then	too	
To compare					
as	as if	also	similarly	likewise	in the same way
as though	just as				
so... as					
To contrast					
although	despite	but at the same time	even so	for all that	however
even though	than	in contrast	in spite of	nevertheless	notwithstanding
though		on the contrary	on the other hand	regardless	still
To provide examples or intensify					
	after all	an illustration of	another/ one example is	even	
	for example	for instance	in fact	in particular	
	indeed	it is true	of course	specifically	
	that is	to illustrate	truly		
To indicate place					
where	wherever	above	adjacent to	atop	below
		beyond	close	elsewhere	farther/ farther on
		here	in	near	nearby
		north, south, east, west	on	on the other side	opposite
		over	there	to the left/ right	
To indicate time					
as	as long as	after a while	afterward	at last	at length
as soon as	after	at that time	before	earlier	formerly
before	now that	immediately	in the meantime	in the past	lately
once	since	later	meanwhile	now	once
until	when	presently	shortly	simultaneously	so far
whenever	while	soon	subsequently	then	thereafter

To show cause or effect

as	because	accordingly	as a result	consequently	for this purpose
as long as	since	hence	otherwise	then	therefore
inasmuch as		thereupon	thus	to this end	with this object

To give additional information or support

additionally	again	also	equally important
furthermore	in addition to	in the first place	incidentally
moreover	more so	next	otherwise
too			

To indicate chronology or order

after	as	afterward	at last	during	earlier
before	once	finally	first, second	formerly	immediately
since	until	in the meantime	later	meanwhile	never
when	whence	next	now	once	shortly
while		subsequently	then	thereafter	

To show logic

because	if	also	as a result	because of	consequently
since		for this reason	hence	however	otherwise
		then	therefore	thus	

To repeat, summarize, or conclude

all in all	altogether	as has been said	finally
in brief	in closing	in conclusion	in other words
in particular	in short	in simpler terms	in summary
on the whole	that is	then	therefore
to close	to put it differently	to sum up	to summarize

To concede

although	even though
if	though
whereas	while

To show conditions

as long as	if	On the condition that
in case	inasmuch as	
provided that	unless	

To show purpose

in order that	lest
so that	that