

Writing Effective Sentence Transitions (Advanced)

Transitions are the rhetorical tools that clarify the logic of your argument by orienting your reader as you develop ideas between sentences and paragraphs. The ability to integrate sentence transitions into your prose, rather than simply throwing in overt transition signals like “in addition,” indicates your mastery of the material.

(Note: The visibility of transitions may vary by discipline; consult with your professor to get a better sense of discipline or assignment specific expectations.)

Transition Signals: Transition signals are words or phrases that indicate the logic connecting sets of information or ideas.

Signals like *therefore*, *on the other hand*, *for example*, *because*, *then*, and *afterwards* can be good transition tools at the sentence and paragraph level. When using these signals, be conscious of the real meaning of these terms; they should reflect the actual relationship between ideas (see handout titled, **Common Transition Words and Phrases** for more specific examples).

Review Words: Review words are transition tools that link groups of sentences or whole paragraphs. They condense preceding discussion into a brief word or phrase.

For example: You’ve just completed a detailed discussion about the greenhouse effect. To transition to the next topic, you could use review words like “*this heat-trapping process*” to refer back to the green house effect discussion. The relative ability to determine a cogent set of review words might signal your own understanding of your work; think of review words as super-short summaries of key ideas.

Preview words (overview): Preview words condense an upcoming discussion into a brief word or phrase.

For example: You’ve just explained how heat is trapped in the earth’s atmosphere. Transitioning to the theory that humans are adding to that effect, you could use preview words like “*sources of additional CO₂ in the atmosphere include*” to point forward to that discussion.

Transition Sentences: The strongest and most sophisticated transition tools, transition sentences indicate the connection between the preceding and upcoming pieces of your argument. They often contain one or more of the above transition tools.

For example: You’ve just discussed how much CO₂ humans have added to the atmosphere. You need to transition to a discussion of the effects. A strong set of transition sentences between the two sections might sound like this:

“These large amounts of CO₂ added to the atmosphere may lead to a number of disastrous consequences for residents of planet earth.

The rise in global temperature that accompanies the extra CO₂ can yield effects as varied as glacial melting and species extinction.”

In the first sentence, the **review words** are “These large amounts of CO₂ added to the atmosphere”; the **preview words** are “number of disastrous consequences”; the **transition signals** are “may lead to.” The topic sentence of the next paragraph indicates the specific “disastrous consequences” you will discuss.

REMEMBER: If you don’t see a way to write a logical, effective transition between sentences, ideas or paragraphs, this might indicate organizational problems in your essay; you might consider revising your work.

Some material adapted from Cal Poly Pomona College Reading Skills Program:

http://www.csupomona.edu/lrc/crsp/handouts/recognizing_words.html; and

“Power Tools for Technical Communication.”

http://www.io.com/~hcxres/power_tools/transitions.html