

## JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### TRANSITIONS AND REMINDER SIGNS

There is one final thing that you need to check before you can be sure your writing is moving smoothly and continuously for the reader. You need to see if you have all along given the reader signals that indicate your direction (transitions) and reminder signs that help the reader remember what you are writing about. Transitions you have probably heard about since high school, at least. The reminder signs will probably be something you haven't thought much about but that you probably use occasionally. Turning a critical eye on these two areas will be the final part of revising for flow and will complete this part of the completing stage of the writing process.

#### TRANSITIONS

The word transition comes from the Latin word transpire which means “to pass from one place to another.” Transitions help the reader to pass from one place (or point) in your writing to the next. And, while transitions may indeed be whole paragraphs in length (function paragraphs), they may also be only a sentence or even a few words--anything that indicates for the reader that you are changing from one point to another or one time to another. Although the forms vary, it is the concept of “transitioning” you want to learn, because once you understand the concept, you will be able to insert transitions into your work in any form-- paragraphs, sentences, or even single words--and you will be able to judge for yourself which form will do the best job for any given situation.

Let's begin by examining the work of other writers to see how they indicate transitions, how they show the movement from thought to thought. Once you can spot the transitions in someone else's writing, and understand how they function (regardless of form), you'll be in good shape to look at your own writing to see whether there are enough adequate transitions. In the essay by John Steward and Gary de'Angelo that follows, the transition signals are marked.

#### GIVING WHAT YOU SAY A SENSE OF WHOLENESS

1. If your experience is anything like ours, people have been telling you to “get **organized**” ever since you were in diapers. Your toy box was to help you learn to **organize** your room. School and work taught you to **organize** your time. And invariably, one goal of English, speech, philosophy, and science classes is to teach you to **organize** your thinking and the ways to

express yourself. Sometimes, I wonder whether we tend to go a little overboard. Gary's got a cartoon on his office door that shows a high-school-age girl deep in thought; and the caption is: "Sometimes they teach things out of me. And I feel like saying, 'I wanted to keep that.'" We sometimes wonder whether spontaneous chaos is one of those things that schools "teach out of us" that we might enjoy--and profit from--keeping. [*Key word repeated*]

2. **On the other hand** [*signals contrast*], most psychologists believe that we naturally structure our world, i.e., that order is more characteristically human than is disorder. **But whether structure is natural or is an artifact of Western culture, it's here** [*signals contrast*]. We do tend to see things and people in wholes made up of parts that are somehow related to one another. **Therefore, communication that has a sense of wholeness is usually easier for us to comprehend clearly than is communication that doesn't** [*signals conclusion and a shift from conclusion to how people act*].

3. **When people perceive something that's "incomplete" or "disordered," they sometimes fill in or add details so that it makes more sense to them. For example** [*signals example*], as you watch a television program you may see an actor put a coffee cup to his lips and make drinking movements. Even though you don't actually see the coffee itself, you mentally "put" coffee in the cup--you fill in the detail. **This same kind of process** [*signals similarity*] can occur when you're talking with another person. If you don't provide a "whole" message, the other person may fill in missing details or examples and in so doing may make your message into something you didn't intend. To the extent that you don't come across as a "whole" person, the other person may fill in or infer things about you that don't adequately characterize you as an individual. **In short, giving a sense of wholeness and some structure to your communication gives you some control over how you and your ideas are perceived by others** [*signals summary*].

4. **The more formal the communication context, the more obvious that sense of wholeness can be** [*shift to general principle about formal/informal contexts*]. Persons listening to a public speech usually expect the talk to be clearly structured. A public speech doesn't have to sound as if it's coming from a robot; the speaker can still promote some person-to-person contact. **But** [*signals contrast*] the speech should usually be pretty clearly organized. Your contribution to a group discussion should also have fairly clear structure, **although** [*signals difference*] it can be less formal than the organization of a speech.

5. **An informal conversation, however, is obviously different from both a speech and a group discussion** [*signals addition and contrast*]. You don't sit down beforehand to **organize** [*repetition of key word*] a conversation--not usually, anyway. (Your first date might have been an exception to that rule. I remember frantically trying to plan topics of conversation for my first major boy-girl social engagements. You know how well that worked.)

6. **Yet structure is important** [*signals reassertion*], even in conversational communication. **For example** [*signals example*], have you ever had a conversation like this?

Fred: How many Christmas presents do we have left to get?

Wilma: Just a couple. You have any ideas for your brother? I don't remember what we got him last year.

Fred: That reminds me, I forgot to call that woman.

Wilma: Huh? Should we call Ann and ask her? I always feel like...

Fred: Damn, that makes me mad! Oh well, he still does a lot of hunting.

Wilma: She remembers Halloween even.

Fred: Who?

Wilma: Was it you who told me about that guy who killed one of the six remaining animals of that one species?

Fred: Yeah, but how does that relate to Sam's present?

7. **In a conversation like that [reminds reader of example]**, the problem is not that there's a total lack of structure. Fred's contributions make all kinds of sense to him, and so do Wilma's--to Wilma. The problem is that the implicit structure is not made explicit. Fred knows the connections among his own statements, but he doesn't bother to show Wilma those relationships, and Wilma doesn't bother to explain anything to Fred.

8. **For example [signals example]**, when Wilma mentions Fred's brother (Sam), Fred pictures Sam on the job--Sam counsels handicapped children--which reminds Fred that he forgot to call a psychologist he works with--"that woman." Wilma hears "that woman" and assumes that Fred is talking about Sam's wife, Ann. Wilma feels uncomfortable around Ann and so begins to say to Fred, "I always feel like ..." Fred doesn't even hear her. He's thinking that they might get Sam something he can use while hunting; when Wilma hears the word "hunting," she remembers a story Fred told her that she's been wanting to share with a friend, but forgot about until now, and so on.

9. **The point we're trying to make is [signals point]** that there's structure even in an informal conversation, in the sense that each person's contributions "fit in" or "follow logically" or "make sense"--**in short [signals summary]**, connect--for that person. Problems arise when two (or more) persons' structures don't merge or fit together. Then you can get the kind of confusing exchange Fred and Wilma had. You can avoid such confusion by thinking of the other person as unique, as someone who doesn't structure the world or the conversation as you do. Your thought patterns, the connections you see between ideas, are different from his or hers. **So [signals conclusion] if [signals condition]** you reveal your thought patterns, if you make them explicit by bringing them to the surface with verbal cues, then the structure of each person's contributions to the conversation becomes apparent to the other, and there will be less room for misinterpretation.

10. **In other words** [*signals rephrasing*], there are ways to structure even informal conversation so that it makes sense. You don't necessarily have to give your conversation a beginning (introduction), middle (body), and end (conclusion). It would sound a little phony if you said to someone in an informal conversation: "Hi, I'm really glad to be talking with you today. As our conversation progresses I'd like to talk about three things: 1) the weather, 2) the movie I saw last night, and 3) our relationship." That kind of organization or structure fits many public speeches, **but** [*signals contrast*] most people prefer spontaneity in informal conversation.

11. **Even** [*signals qualification*] in an informal conversation, **however** [*signals qualification*], you can verbalize the implicit structure, **that is** [*signals rephrasing*], talk about the links you're seeing between ideas. **When you don't** [*contrasts conditions*], you leave open the possibility for all kinds of misinterpretation. When you do, you significantly improve your chances of adequately limiting the range of interpretations, **i.e.** [*signals rephrasing*], you improve your chances of "being clear."

This selection is rich with connectors that act as a map to guide the reader from major point to major point, and also as a blueprint of structure even within the sentences themselves. The reader appreciates this wealth of clues, too, even though some of them may not register on the conscious level. In fact, sometimes clues work best when they are so smooth and subtle that the reader doesn't even notice them, but rather takes them for granted. However, by means of such clues the writer's ideas are made to flow smoothly and steadily for the reader. Without clues, the reader's head bobs from point to point in a hopelessly wobbling fashion.

### **TRANSITION WORDS**

To signal that what follows is **additional or supplementary**:

in addition	as if that weren't enough	furthermore	indeed	then, too
besides	moreover	again	also	and
in fact	or, nor	first, second, etc.		

To signal a **contradiction, antithesis, or contrast**:

yet	on the contrary	although	and yet
for all that	notwithstanding	though	nonetheless
surely	whereas	still	in spite of this
not at all	however	even so	on the other hand
nevertheless	but		

To signal that what follows is **similar** to what precedes:

likewise      in like manner      in much the same way      similarly  
 once again      once more

To signal that what follows is a **result** of what precedes:

as a result      wherefore      so      as a consequence      and so  
 consequently      thus      for this reason      hence      finally  
 therefore      all in all      on the whole      in as much as      this is why

For **reasons**:

because      since      for

For **concessions**:

to be sure      of course      granted (that)      no doubt      certainly  
 doubtless

For **qualifications**:

specifically      frequently      especially      occasionally      usually      in particular  
 in general

To signal that what follows is an **illustration or example**:

for example      for instance      to illustrate      likewise      for one thing      similarly  
 in other words

For **restriction**:

if provided      unless      provided      lest      in case      when

To illustrate that what follows is a **repetition or intensification** of what precedes:

to put it another way      in other words      as we have seen  
 as has already been said      in fact      to repeat  
 as noted earlier      indeed      in any case

To signal that what follows is **quite expected, quite natural, or obviously true**:

naturally      it follows, then, that      to be sure      for that matter  
of course      as a matter of fact      surely

**Pronouns and adjectives pointing back to an original noun:**

this    who/whom    it    few    that    they    many    these  
he/she    all of them    most    those    some    several

To signal **relationship in time** (often used in narration):

in the meantime      beforehand      presently      thereupon  
with that out of the way      the next day      thereafter      following this  
when I returned      at length      from then on      meanwhile  
by that time      at that very moment      soon      at last  
afterwards      soon afterward      earlier      immediately  
shortly before      within an hour      later

To signal **relationship in space** (often used in description):

at that altitude      about a foot      to the left  
a little farther on      between those cities      at the center of the circle  
in the next room      across the way      on the edge of the clearing  
beyond this point

To signal that what follows is a **summary**:

to summarize      therefore      all in all      in brief      in short  
what all this adds up to      in a word      in summary      what we have, then,

## Practice Exercises

In each of the following paragraphs, the topic sentence has been left out. Choose the sentence that best sums up the key idea of the paragraph. Later, a link has been left out that would help take the reader from one part to the next. Choose the link that fits best.

1. My cousin Jane was not an only child, but she was the prettiest in the family. Her mother was not particularly good-looking, and she tried to live her life through her daughter's. The mother practically adored the boys that Jane dated. \_\_\_\_\_ Jane could always get from her mother everything she thought she wanted. Everything she did was considered exceptionally smart or cute. She went and came as she pleased, never being asked to observe definite hours.

- Key Sentence:
- A. Cousin Jane was very good-looking.
  - B. Cousin Jane was very spoiled.
  - C. Cousin Jane was very popular.

- Missing Link:
- A. However
  - B. As a result
  - C. On the other hand

2. Huckleberry Finn just barely managed to escape harm at the hands of his drunken, violent father. Every time he steps off his raft he is menaced by people. He sees an old man shot down in a public street. He sees two young boys hunted down in a family feud. \_\_\_\_\_ his own traveling companions--the Duke and the Dauphin--become the victims of crude violence.

- Key Sentence:
- A. Huck Finn lives in an adult world of violence.
  - B. Huck Finn is frequently the target of adult violence.
  - C. Huck manages to escape when threatened by violence.

- Missing Link:
- A. Moreover
  - B. However
  - C. Nevertheless

3. Charity is not simply a donation to the community chest. It is \_\_\_\_\_ picking up one's toys, giving a hand with the dinner dishes, writing a bread-and-butter letter to one's hostess. It is turning off television at a respectable hour so one's neighbor can sleep in peace, and being patient with bores. It is thanking salesladies in shops, forbearing to pass on the bit of malicious gossip so tempting to tell, wielding knife and fork so that we do not offend.

- Key Sentence:
- A. True charity means respecting other's right to be alone.
  - B. True charity requires considerate behavior towards others.
  - C. The most important part of true charity is patience.

- Missing Link:
- A. instead
  - B. also
  - C. therefore

4. The function and consequently the meaning of the sun are different in northern and tropical countries. In northern countries, where water is plentiful, all growth depends on sunshine. The sun is a warm, life-giving, protecting, loving power. In the Near East, where the heat of the sun is powerful, the sun is a dangerous and even threatening power from which man must protect himself, \_\_\_\_\_ water is the source of all life and the main condition for growth.

- Key Sentence:
- A. The sun is the basic life-giving element of our planet.
  - B. Sun and water have different symbolic meanings in different regions.
  - C. Sun and rain are the main conditions for growth.

- Missing Link:
- A. although
  - B. until
  - C. whereas



5. The average driver, who wouldn't even know it when the back end started to break away, unable to sense a front-wheel slide in time to do anything about it, unskilled in the business of steering on the throttle, is perfectly helpless if the car deviates from a straight line at high speeds. Because he can run up and down the Pennsylvania Turnpike all day as fast as he can go--if his luck holds--he's apt to think he's a safe high-speed driver. \_\_\_\_\_ what happens if he blows a tire, hits a slippery place, or comes around a bend to find a wreck in front of him?

Key Sentence:

- A. Average drivers risk disaster when driving a car at high speeds.
- B. Any driver can have an unexpected accident.
- C. After an accident, the average driver often does not know what went wrong.

Missing Link:

- A. But
- B. Moreover
- C. Similarly