

Let It Flow!

How to Transition Between Ideas

So you have your thesis, you made a plan, and you wrote your introduction. All your subsequent paragraphs will make points that will help support your thesis, but how do you connect your ideas and make your paper *flow*? You can use **transitions** to weave sentences or paragraphs together and show the relationship between your points. Here are some easy tips to **transition** between ideas in your paper.

➤ *If your points relate by time, order, or sequence...*

When your points relate together in a specific logical order, such as events in a story, step by step instructions, or a spatial description, you can transition your discussion sequentially.

For example,

Before you actually perceive a sensation through touch, such as the softness of a kitten rubbing on your leg, your nervous system undergoes many steps. **Initially**, receptors specific to a sensation, such as those for temperature, pressure or vibration, stimulate action potentials to the sensory neurons in your skin. **Next**, the impulse propagates down the axons of all the sensory neurons in a pathway **until** it reaches the Central Nervous System. Inside the CNS the brain is the processing center of somatic information, with only a few exceptions. This is when you recognize, "It's Cuddles, my kitten!" **Once** the brain has processed the impulse, it will activate motor neurons with a response along a pathway back to the source of the sensation. The motor neurons can prorate multiple signals to different parts of your body, and **finally** the motor neurons will stimulate the muscles of your torso to bend over and pet the kitten.

Some transition words that signal *time, sequence or order*:

meanwhile	near	before	later	during	afterward
in addition	next to	above	under	last	earlier
inside	finally	eventually	behind	in between	thus
next	then	another	also	first	simultaneously

➤ *If your points relate by cause and effect...*

When you are describing a relationship between your ideas where the former has had an effect or consequence on the latter, you can use different transitional words to signal this connection.

For example,

While contracted by the NSA, Edward Snowden had access to millions of classified U.S. government documents. He leaked several documents to the press in early 2013, and **consequently** brought international attention to the issue of unauthorized global surveillance.

Some transition words that signal *cause and effect*:

consequently because of as a result of therefore hence former/latter

➤ ***If your points relate by comparison/contrast...***

When you are looking to support or refute ideas you present in your paper, you can use transition words that signal a relationship between the ideas.

For example,

The green light illuminating Daisy's dock that can be seen from Gatsby's house serves as a symbol of the intangibility of the American dream. Gatsby is fixated on the flashing light throughout the course of the novel, **and yet** it remains out of his reach. **Likewise**, Fitzgerald used the flashing green light analogy to allude to the broader question of whether the American dream is ever truly attainable.

Some transition words that signal *comparison*:

likewise furthermore still similarly in a similar way

Some transition words that signal *contrast*:

however despite this instead of even so yet conversely whereas

➤ ***If your point is to reiterate an idea...***

Sometimes in your writing you might want to express a point with emphasis, or to summarize what you have already said. Using transition words can help you rephrase or restate an important idea or concept.

For example,

At an alarmingly unprecedented rate, Earth's climate is becoming more volatile and unpredictable due to human activity, and threatens the very future of life on the planet. **In other words**, refusal to address climate change might kill us all.

Transition words that signal *reiteration*:

in summary to conclude in sum clearly of course to summarize in other words

Once you master the art of linking ideas to form relationships between your points, you can **next** insert the appropriate transition words and phrases into your paper. Making your writing *flow* will become effortless. **As a result**, your professors, peers, and strangers at the Hannaford will marvel at the eloquence and coherence of your writing.

* As adapted from Aaron, Jane E. *Essential Handbook for Writers* (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 2003) 229, and Kirszner, Laurie G. and Stephen R. Mandel *Focus on Writing Paragraphs and Essays* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008) 40-41.