

STRONG TRANSITIONS IN ESSAYS



Build Bridges between Ideas

- ▣ Imagine two information-packed paragraphs sitting on opposite sides of waterfall. The easiest way to get to the second paragraph is by going straight across the rushing water. You, as a writer, are challenged to guide your reader from the last sentence in the first paragraph to the first sentence in the next paragraph. You will need to create a well-built bridge so that readers can follow the focus in one paragraph to the focus in the next one.



- ❑ In effective writing, bridges are referred to as transitions. Transitions are links between ideas, sentences and paragraphs. They help your reader move easily from one thought to the next as well as ensure that they stay interested in your topic. Remember, bridge building takes practice and it may take a couple of tries to figure out the type of bridge that works best for connecting your ideas.

Suggestions for Creating Transitions

- ▣ Read the last sentence of your paragraphs. Ask yourself, “What does my reader expect to hear next?” If your next paragraph does not meet those expectations, add a sentence to the beginning of the next paragraph that effectively transitions from the last paragraph’s focus to the new paragraph’s focus.
- ▣ When checking your paper for clear transitions, don’t assume that your reader knows what you know. You need to write out and explain what may seem like an obvious connection for you.
- ▣ Make sure the transitions belong where you place them. Do not begin transitions at the end of paragraphs. Transitions should start at the moment when you are transitioning into a new focus – at the beginning of the new paragraph.

An Excerpt from an Essay Without Transitions

□

□ I saw a shirt once that read, “Happiness is living in Rushford, Minnesota.” I laughed when I saw this shirt because Rushford is a dinky town of 2,000 in the southeast corner of Minnesota, close to Wisconsin, and with plenty of cows, farms, dirt roads, and not a lot of action. I lived there when I was a teenager. It’s a dull little town, so when I saw this shirt recently, I rolled my eyes and let out a big gasp of disbelief.

□ My favorite place to eat is Subway. I love their roasted turkey sandwiches with Swiss cheese and tomatoes. Rushford had only one place to eat when I was 15 and living there: Subway. So, that is one thing it had going for it, I guess. Subway was the cool place to work, the best place to go on a date, and the local hangout on Friday nights. It was the most happening place to be.

□ I am an advertising executive. I live in New York City now and my life is so busy now that I barely have time to eat lunch. But when I do eat lunch, I like to go to Subway. It reminds me of little Rushford when I’m there. Part of me feels like I’m sitting in that warm, steamy shop in the middle of a blizzard. It makes me nostalgic.

Here is the Same Essay with Transitions Added

- ▣ I saw a shirt once that read, “Happiness is living in Rushford, Minnesota.” I laughed when I saw this shirt because Rushford is a dinky town of 2,000 in the southeast corner of Minnesota, close to Wisconsin, and with plenty of cows, farms, dirt roads, and not a lot of action. I lived there when I was a teenager. It’s a dull little town, so when I saw this shirt recently, I rolled my eyes and let out a big gasp of disbelief.
- ▣ It wasn’t that I despised Rushford, but I needed more excitement in my life as a 15-year old. For example, in Rushford, they had only one place to eat: Subway. So, that is one thing it had going for it, I guess. Subway was the cool place to work, the best place to go on a date, and the local hangout on Friday nights. It was the most happening place to be. I will admit that to this day, my favorite place to eat is Subway. I love their roasted turkey sandwiches with Swiss cheese and tomatoes.

I eat these sandwiches in New York City now where I work as an advertising executive. My life is so busy now that I barely have time to eat lunch. But when I do eat lunch, I like to go to Subway. It reminds me of little Rushford when I’m there. Part of me feels like I’m sitting in that warm, steamy shop in the middle of a blizzard. It makes me nostalgic.

The Transitions Used...

- ▣ Notice that I added a sentence at the beginning of each paragraph to show that I wasn't exactly abandoning the last paragraph's focus, I was simply moving forward. The transitions used were the first sentence of each new paragraph:
- ▣ “It wasn't that I despised Rushford, but I needed more excitement in my life as a 15-year old.”
and
- ▣ “I eat these sandwiches in New York City now where I work as an advertising executive.”

Final words on transitions

- ▣ The preceding list of transitional words and phrases can be a useful tool when constructing your bridges. However, do not assume that just because you use one of these words, you have an effective transition. Remember, the idea is what makes a transition, not simply using a word like “furthermore.”
- ▣ Again, I encourage you to read the last sentence of each paragraph and the first sentence of the next paragraph. Do they work? Is there a transition at the start of that new paragraph that signals to the reader that the last focus is over and a new idea will begin?

What's key...

- You must begin each new paragraph with a “nod” to the preceding focus before moving forward.
- You can make this “nod” by using the helpful sentence structure of, “Although (input what preceding sentence or paragraph was referring to), (write a topic sentence of what this new paragraph will focus on).
- You can use a word from the preceding sentence that ended the paragraph to show some segue that you're making.

Some “Transition” Words to Use

To show comparison or contrast:

Whereas, on the other hand, on the contrary, although, conversely, at the same time, similarly, in contrast.

To show you are building on the topic more:

Furthermore, additionally, as noted, in addition, also, next, finally, more specifically.

To show an exception of some sort:

In spite of, nevertheless, sometimes, despite, still, however, yet, once in a while.

To clarify a point you just made:

To explain, to clarify, to put it another way, in other words, to rephrase, better explained this way..., that is to say.

To show cause/effect:

Therefore, as a result, thus, as a result, accordingly, for that reason, on account of, hence.