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TRANSITIONS

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THE NEED FOR TRANSITIONS

All writers want their papers "to flow." This rather vague phrase usually refers to the idea of continuity and progression to which most writers aspire. Often, a writer will create a well-argued paper, complete with a strong thesis and substantial evidence, only to find the paper "dry." Other times, the lack of fluidity in an essay may stem directly from weakness in the organization of ideas. In both cases, the effective use of transitions helps immeasurably.

IDENTIFYING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN IDEAS

Just as linked sentences within a paragraph lead the reader, so too must linked paragraphs direct the reader from one idea to another. But no writer can cover up a misdirected argument. The first step in writing a cohesive argument lies in outlining your ideas and organizing them soundly. Take the time to prioritize your arguments; exploit the differences between points, set up comparisons and contrasts, then construct transitions to explain the relationship between your ideas. Let your organization do the transition work for you. Often, you need only to state the relationship between successive paragraphs in order to have a successful transition. For example, a paragraph citing the shortcomings of a state lottery ends:

> *The state focuses nearly all its publicity effort on merchandising a get-rich-quick fantasy, one that will come true for only a handful of people, while encouraging millions of others to think of success as a product of luck, not honest work.*

The following paragraph immediately sets up a contrasting view:

> *While the shortcomings of the state lottery system are numerous, there are sound arguments for allowing state lotteries to continue and spread....*

The reader now sees the relationship between paragraphs and expects to read a defense of the lottery system.

IMPLEMENTING TRANSITIONS

The transition process applies to all types of arguments. If you have strong evidence in each paragraph, transitions may simply mark the movement from one point to another. If you want to show a cause and effect relationship, you need only express that connection. <u>Whatever relationship your ideas share, identify that connection and communicate it to the reader</u>. You may add to, emphasize, summarize, or end an argument. Once you know the relationship, the options are plentiful and logical.

TRANSITIONAL STRATEGIES

The end of one paragraph can set up a clear connection to the next paragraph, whether you aim to reinforce or debunk what has been stated. One way to create a

transition is to repeat a key word or phrase from the preceding paragraph. In addition, since all paragraphs should help prove the thesis, another strategy could be to remind the reader of that larger goal.

For example, if my thesis is an attempt to prove Satan to be a sympathetic character in *Paradise Lost*, I may move from a paragraph citing Satan's self doubt to another that explains Satan's monologues:

> *Because Satan **doubts** his choices throughout Paradise Lost, he appears human, fallible, and ultimately **sympathetic** toa reader who identifies with the human rather than the super human.*
>
> ***Another** characteristic that suggests Milton viewed Satan **sympathetically** emerges in Satan's melancholy monologues. Like Satan's self-**doubt**, his monologues display the manner in which he longs for acceptance in Eden...*

In the above transition, I repeated the word '**doubt**,' employed the transitional '**another**,' and connected both paragraphs to my thesis about Satan's '**sympathetic**' nature.

COMMON TRANSITIONAL WORDS AND PHRASES

<u>To link complementary ideas</u>: *again, in addition, at the same time, in the same way, similarly, likewise, hence, as a result, furthermore, moreover, secondly, thirdly*.

<u>To link conflicting ideas</u>: *in reality, in truth, on the contrary, on the other hand, nonetheless, however, in contrast*.

<u>To demonstrate cause and effect</u>: *therefore, thus, so, it follows, then, as a result, consequently*.

TRANSITIONS AS BRIDGES

One can think of transitions as bridges between sentences and paragraphs for the reader. These bridges show relationships between ideas. You should ask yourself: "How are the paragraphs linked? Do additional connections need to be identified? Do any of the transitional techniques try to create relationships which are not valid?" The best essay appears effortless; transitions that cultivate well-constructed progressions of thought will improve an essay considerably.

Sources:

Barnet and Stubbs's Practical Guide to Writing, Student's Guide for Writing College Papers, The Random House Handbook, Prentice Hall Reference Guide to Grammar and Usage, and The St. Martin's Handbook.

All of these sources are available for your use at the Writing Center. If you have any questions about writing transitions, check with your professor or with a tutor at the Writing Center.