
Section Objectives:

- Students will be able to define *organization* as it relates to writing.
- Students will be able to assess and critique common organizational methods found in writing.
- Students will be able to select appropriate transitions to use both within and between paragraphs in a written work.

The Structure of a Composition

Any composition has both an external and an internal structure. The external structure of most academic papers includes three different types of paragraphs: introductory paragraphs, body paragraphs, and concluding paragraphs. All academic papers begin with an introduction. The introduction should contain an opener and thesis statement, the main argument of your paper. After the introduction come the body paragraphs. There should be at least three, but more than three is fine. Each paragraph should contain one controlling idea and at least one piece of evidence that supports your thesis statement. The final paragraph is the conclusion, which restates the thesis and wraps up the paper.

Just as important as this external structure, is the internal structure of a paper. It is not enough to have a strong thesis statement and supporting evidence. The paper must also show how these things are connected. One way to show the connections among ideas is by using transitions.

Transitions

Transitions are words and phrases that used between paragraphs to show how they are connected. Transitions within paragraphs show the connections among the sentences of the paragraph. Any writing that does not have transitions will be very difficult for a reader to follow and understand. The following paragraphs illustrate how difficult it is to read a composition that is missing transitions.

Henry VIII is one of the most famous British monarchs of all time. He is known mainly for having six wives, two of which he had executed. Henry was not supposed to be king, but after his older brother died, he took the throne. His first wife was named Catherine of Aragon. He fell in love with a woman named Anne Boleyn. He tried to have his marriage with Catherine annulled, but the pope would not allow it. Henry proclaimed himself the head of the Church of England and divorced Catherine. This was the beginning of the Church of England. He and Anne married. They were married for four years, but Anne did not produce a male heir. Henry decided he needed a wife who could give him a son. Anne was executed in 1536. Henry married four more times. He died in 1547.

Henry's son Edward became the next king. Edward was only 9 years old and in poor health. Unfortunately, he died at 15. Mary, Catherine of Aragon's daughter, became queen and changed England's religion back to Roman Catholicism. Mary was queen for five years. She died in 1558. Her half-sister Elizabeth, Anne Boleyn's daughter, became queen. Elizabeth was queen for 42 years.

Although all of these sentences relate to the same topic, they seem like a collection of unrelated sentences because of the lack of transitions. Transitions act like road signs. They tell readers where they are, where to head next, and what to do when they get there.

Transitions between Paragraphs

With the exception of the introductory paragraph, which will begin with an introduction strategy, the paragraphs of a paper should each begin with a sentence that does two things -- reminds the reader of what has been said in the previous paragraph and previews the topic of the current paragraph.



Transitions between paragraphs should reflect on what went before and highlight what is coming up next.

Notice the difference when a transitional phrase is added to the paragraphs about Henry VIII and his children.

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After Henry's death, Henry's son Edward became the next king. Edward was only 9 years old and in poor health. Unfortunately, he died at 15. Mary, Catherine of Aragon's daughter, became queen and changed England's religion back to Roman Catholicism. Mary was queen for five years. She died in 1558. Her half-sister Elizabeth, Anne Boleyn's daughter, became queen. Elizabeth was queen for 42 years.

Just that one simple phrase connects the two paragraphs. It tells readers what has happened before, by referencing Henry's death, and lets them know what the subject of the next paragraph is: who took the throne after Henry's death.

Transitions within Paragraphs

There are four categories of transitions, each of which shows a different kind of logical relationship.

Additive Transitions

Addition: In addition, furthermore

Introduction: For example, such as, particularly

Reference: With regards to, as for this/that

Similarity: Similarly, likewise

Identification: Namely, specifically

Clarification: In other words, that is

Adversative Transitions

Conflict: However, in contrast

Emphasis: Indeed, more importantly

Concession: Nevertheless, on the other hand

Dismissal: In either case, at any rate

Replacement: Rather, at least

Causal Transitions

Cause/reason: For the reason that, due to the fact that

Effect/result: Consequently, therefore

Purpose: In order that, so as to

Consequence: Then, otherwise

Condition: Unless, so long as

Sequential Transitions

Numerical: First, second

Continuation: Previously, eventually

Conclusion: Finally, at last

Summation: Thus, overall

Not every sentence in a paragraph requires a transition. However, any sentence that does not seem connected to the previous sentence will require a transition. Furthermore, transitions are not always at the beginning of the sentence. They can be in the middle of the sentence and, occasionally, at the end of the sentence. Finally, not all transitions will use specific transition words. Sometimes a sentence needs to repeat a word that was said previously in order to make the connection clear.

Practice

Read the paragraphs that follow and insert transitions where they are needed.

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