

245W: Transitions and flowⁱ

Now that you have a framework for your term paper, how do you go about connecting those ideas from your outline or idea map into a well-written draft?

Think of writing a paragraph for each point or topic sentence, or make sure you already have one topic [sentence] per paragraph. Afterwards, within each paragraph, use transitional words or phrases to ensure your detail sentences lead the reader along a premeditated logical sequence that reinforces your topic sentence. (Imagine in your mind, your reader exclaiming, "Of course, that makes perfect sense!", after reading each of your paragraphs.) For instance, let's take a look at the following example from Hacker (2007), where she has italicized all transitions in an excerpt from Stephen Jay Gould's, "Were Dinosaurs Dumb?":

I don't wish to deny that the flattened, miniscule head of largebodied Stegosaurus houses little brain from our subjective, top-heavy perspective, *but* I do wish to assert that we should not expect more of the beast. *First of all*, large animals have relatively smaller brains than related, small animals. The correlation of brain size with body size among kindred animals (all reptiles, all mammals, *for example*) is remarkably regular. *As* we move from small to large animals, from mice to elephants or small lizards to Komodo dragons, brain size increases, *but* not so fast as body size. *In other words*, bodies grow faster than brains, and large animals have low ratios of brain weight to body weight. *In fact*, brains grow only about two-thirds as fast as bodies. *Since* we have no reason to believe that large animals are consistently stupider than their smaller relatives, we must conclude that large animals require relatively less brain to do as well as smaller animals. *If* we do not recognize this relationship, we are likely to underestimate the mental power of very large animals, dinosaurs *in particular*.

In order to use transitions effectively, you will need to understand how your sentences within a given paragraph work together. Below is a list of common transitions you can use in order for your sentences to fulfill each function (from Hacker 2007).

- *To show addition* - and, also, besides, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, next, too, first, second
- *To give examples* - for example, for instance, to illustrate, in fact, specifically
- *To compare* - also, in the same manner, similarly, likewise
- *To contrast* - but, however, on the other hand, in contrast, nevertheless, still, even though, on the contrary, yet, although
- *To summarize or conclude* - in other words, in short, in summary, in conclusion, to sum up, that is, therefore
- *To show time* - after, as, before, next, during, later, finally, meanwhile, since, then, when, while, immediately
- *To show place or direction* - above, below, beyond, farther on, nearby, opposite, close, to the left

- *To indicate logical relationship* - if, so, therefore, consequently, thus, as a result, for this reason, because, since

These transitions should also be placed between paragraphs in order for your draft as a whole to flow as well as that previous paragraph. If you remember that your term paper as a whole should make sense, more-or-less, with only your topic sentences, it is natural to try to make those topic sentences connect with each other through transitions. Let's take at another example from Hacker (2007), which is an excerpt from Jonathan H. Alder's "Little Green Lies", with topic sentences marked by italics:

Consider aseptic packaging, the synthetic packaging for the "juice boxes" so many children bring to school with their lunch. *One criticism of aseptic packaging is that it is nearly impossible to recycle, yet on almost every other count, aseptic packaging is environmentally preferable to the packaging alternatives.* Not only do aseptic containers not require refrigeration to keep their contents from spoiling, but their manufacture requires less than one-10th the energy of making glass bottles.

What is true for juice boxes is also true for other forms of synthetic packaging. The use of polystyrene, which is commonly (and mistakenly) referred to as "Styrofoam," can reduce food waste dramatically due to its insulating properties. (Thanks to these properties, polystyrene cups are much preferred over paper for that morning cup of coffee.) Polystyrene also requires significantly fewer resources to produce than its paper counterpart.

Hacker and I disagree on which sentence in the first paragraph is to topic sentence, but you can see that Alder is using transitions as well as the phrases "aseptic packaging" and "synthetic packaging" to sustain his argument between the paragraphs.

Read through your draft after you have added all the information you would like it to contain, and see if everything makes sense. If it doesn't quite seem to, determine whether this is because you don't have all the information you need to support your thesis (in which case you need to do more research and reading), or whether you haven't quite structured your argument as well as you could have. In the latter case, adding transitions may help because this will force you to make your thought process explicit. For instance, you will have to determine whether you were trying to give an example, or were trying to compare or contrast ideas in order to use the appropriate transition.

References

Hacker, D. 2007. *A Writer's Reference*, 6th edition. Bedford/St. Martin's

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