**Topic Sentences and Transitions**

**Topic Sentences:** A topic sentence is a sentence that captures the meaning of the entire paragraph or group of sentences. It tells what the passage is mainly about. The **topic sentence** is the most important sentence in your paragraph. Carefully worded and restricted, it helps you generate and control your information. An effective topic sentence also helps readers grasp your main idea quickly. As you draft your paragraphs, pay close attention to the following three guidelines:

* Make sure you provide a topic sentence
* Put your topic sentence first
* Be sure your topic sentence is focused. If restricted, a topic sentence discusses only one central idea. A broad or unrestricted topic sentence leads to a shaky, incomplete paragraph for two reasons:
* The paragraph will not contain enough information to support the topic sentence.
* A broad topic sentence will not summarize or forecast specific information in the paragraph.

Good topic sentences:

1. introduce the topic of a paragraph without announcing it
2. hook the reader
3. plant questions in the readers' mind
4. use thought-provoking words
5. are usually the first sentence; however, it can occur anywhere in the paragraph or it can be implied
6. provide a transition from the previous paragraph

**Examples of flawed topic sentences:  
Introduces multiple topics:** *Teens often take drugs because they are depressed, and there are many health risks associated with drugs.* **Too broad:** *Drugs have bad things linked to them.***Too specific, what will come next?:** *John Belushi is a famous actor who died from drugs.* **Examples of good topic sentences:***Depression triggers many teens to take drugs.**Hard drugs such as Meth, Cocaine, or Heroin carry serious health risks.*

*Even some of America's brightest stars have fallen victim to drug addiction.*

**Transitions:** In both academic writing and professional writing, your goal is to convey information clearly and concisely, if not to convert the reader to your way of thinking. Transitions help you to achieve these goals by establishing **logical connections between sentences, paragraphs, and sections of your papers.** In other words, transitions tell readers what to do with the information you present to them. Whether single words, quick phrases or full sentences, they function as signs for readers that tell them how to think about, organize, and react to old and new ideas as they read through what you have written.

Transitions signal relationships between ideas such as: "Another example coming up—stay alert!" or "Here's an exception to my previous statement" or "Although this idea appears to be true, here's the real story." Basically, transitions provide the reader with directions for how to piece together your ideas into a logically coherent argument. Transitions are not just verbal decorations that embellish your paper by making it sound or read better. They are words with particular meanings that tell the reader to think and react in a particular way to your ideas. In providing the reader with these important cues, transitions help readers understand the logic of how your ideas fit together.

**Types of transitions**

Now that you have a general idea of how to go about developing effective transitions in your writing, let us briefly discuss the types of transitions your writing will use. The types of transitions available to you are as diverse as the circumstances in which you need to use them. A transition can be a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire paragraph. In each case, it functions the same way: first, the transition either directly summarizes the content of a preceding sentence, paragraph, or section or implies such a summary (by reminding the reader of what has come before). Then it helps the reader anticipate or comprehend the new information that you wish to present.

1. **Transitions between sections—**Particularly in longer works, it may be necessary to include transitional paragraphs that summarize for the reader the information just covered and specify the relevance of this information to the discussion in the following section.
2. **Transitions between paragraphs—**If you have done a good job of arranging paragraphs so that the content of one leads logically to the next, the transition will highlight a relationship that already exists by summarizing the previous paragraph and suggesting something of the content of the paragraph that follows. A transition between paragraphs can be a word or two (*however, for example, similarly*), a phrase, or a sentence. Transitions can be at the end of the first paragraph, at the beginning of the second paragraph, or in both places.
3. **Transitions within paragraphs—**As with transitions between sections and paragraphs, transitions within paragraphs act as cues by helping readers to anticipate what is coming before they read it. Within paragraphs, transitions tend to be single words or short phrases.

**Transitional expressions**

Effectively constructing each transition often depends upon your ability to identify words or phrases that will indicate for the reader the *kind* of logical relationships you want to convey. The table below should make it easier for you to find these words or phrases. Whenever you have trouble finding a word, phrase, or sentence to serve as an effective transition, refer to the information in the table for assistance. Look in the left column of the table for the kind of logical relationship you are trying to express. Then look in the right column of the table for examples of words or phrases that express this logical relationship.

Keep in mind that each of these words or phrases may have a slightly different meaning. Consult a dictionary or writer's handbook if you are unsure of the exact meaning of a word or phrase.

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| **LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP** | **TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSION** |
| **Similarity** | **also, in the same way, just as ... so too, likewise, similarly** |
| **Exception/Contrast** | **but, however, in spite of, on the one hand ... on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, in contrast, on the contrary, still, yet** |
| **Sequence/Order** | **first, second, third, ... next, then, finally** |
| **Time** | **after, afterward, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, immediately, later, meanwhile, now, recently, simultaneously, subsequently, then** |
| **Example** | **for example, for instance, namely, specifically, to illustrate** |
| **Emphasis** | **even, indeed, in fact, of course, truly** |
| **Place/Position** | **above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there** |
| **Cause and Effect** | **accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus** |
| **Additional Support or Evidence** | **additionally, again, also, and, as well, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then** |
| **Conclusion/Summary** | **finally, in a word, in brief, briefly, in conclusion, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, thus, to conclude, to summarize, in sum, to sum up, in summary** |