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Transitions, Segues, and Signals

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The purpose of this article is to help students understand how to use transition words and phrases to smoothly lead the reader through the various rhetorical moves of their paper.

Writing is Like Music

Like a good song with a catchy beat, rhythm is key to creating an engaging paper. Just like when moving from the verse to the chorus, to maintain the rhythm in an essay, you must successfully use transition words and phrases. Deciding on where transitions best fit is more of an art than a science, and audiences are all too aware when a transition is missing, and the author awkwardly leads the reader to the next subject. Transitions help to link the text's main ideas and help the reader enjoy their reading experience.

Keep the Beat

Like many aspects of writing, there is no single equation for how to transition well. However, there are some key concepts you can draw upon to develop your own style and make it feel less formulaic. Transition words can include language like "furthermore," "comparatively," "however," etc. Transition phrases might be terms like "on the other hand," "in the same way," "for example," etc. Transition clauses are often dependent clauses at the beginning or end of one sentence that connect to an idea in the next sentence. The language of dependent clauses might include, "While it is apparent that X is true..." or "...which demonstrates the truth of Y."

Transitions are frequently used when linking or switching subjects. They typically appear at the beginning of the sentence or paragraph to help relate a new topic to the previous one or to link points within a topic. By using transitions, you seamlessly integrate each important aspect of your argument in a way that is enjoyable to read. Transitions help to create an engaging paper and make reading the paper more entertaining for the audience. They are also a creative tool to maintain clarity and return the reader to the main point.

There are two common mistakes concerning transitions. The first is not using them enough. An argument without transitions reads more like an outline, and it becomes difficult for readers to both remember the main points amid all the details and to enjoy the journey. The second most common mistake concerning transitions is overusing them – or using the same ones repetitively. Arguments with too many transitions feel redundant and slow down the reader and lose the main argumentative thread by making so many turns. The writer should aim to strike a balance to keep the rhythm and beat of the paper steady. Using simple sentences along with those including transitions can add variety to help achieve an engaging flow for your paper.

Example

Transition words help with clarity and allow the reader to better follow the argument. Without transition phrases, a student's section of writing might look like this:

CBU was established in 1950 in El Monte by the Los Angeles Southern Baptist Association. Several more buildings were needed for the growing college population. The college moved to Riverside, California. The population continued to grow to what it is today, sitting at around 11,491.

With transition phrases, the same passage would look like this:

Furthermore, CBU was established in 1950 in El Monte by the Los Angeles Southern Baptist Association. As a result of the growing college population, several more buildings were needed, and thus, the college moved to Riverside, California. Additionally, the population continued to grow to what it is today, sitting at around 11,491.

Note how the transitions provide some sentence variety and subtly remind the reader of the paragraph's purpose, situating the sentences in a clear context.

A helpful list of transition words, including their various functions, is available [here](#).

Tips

1. Don't overuse transitions; they can become repetitive and throw off the rhythm of your paper. But don't underuse them either; without transitions, your writing will feel stiff and unengaging.
2. Match the appropriate transition word for the context. For example, if you are *continuing* your argument, you might use "additionally", but if you are contrasting a point, you'd more likely use "however."
3. Make sure you understand the framework of your text; if you can see where transitions may be needed between arguments, doing this can help you to use them more effectively.

Works Consulted

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