

TRANSITIONS AND COHERENCE

Transitions are a fundamental part of writing well. They create connections *for* your readers so they don't have to fill in the gaps. (Remember, they can't read your mind; what seems obvious to a writer usually needs to be spelled out, literally, for the reader). When you use transitions well, your readers will be on the same page as you, and your writing will be coherent (it will flow) instead of choppy. A good transition does the following:

- Clarifies connections by leading one idea smoothly to the next
- Indicates relationship between ideas in sentences and paragraphs

KNOWN-NEW CONSTRUCTION

One way to link ideas is the "known-new" construction, where you take something already mentioned and use it to introduce something new. For example,

No transition: "I went to the store yesterday. I saw Roger."

Known-new construction: "I went to the store yesterday. While I was there, I saw Roger."

In this example, "while I was there," refers back to the store and introduces a new idea: "I saw Roger." Notice how this helps link the ideas and create a better-sounding sentence. That's the power of a good transition. Of course, the "known-new" construction doesn't always fit, so don't overdo it. Just keep an eye out for gaps and ways to bridge them.

TRANSITION WORDS

To help point readers in a slightly new direction, use transition words. The following are some examples of these words and how they are used:

- *To add or show sequence:* again, then, besides, first, second, third, last
- *To compare:* also, in the same way, likewise, similarly
- *To contrast or show exception:* although, but, however, nevertheless, still, though, yet, in contrast
- *To give examples or intensify:* after all, for example, for instance
- *To indicate place:* above, below, here, there, near, nearby
- *To indicate time:* after a while, afterward, once, before, later, now, soon, then, until
- *To show cause or effect:* as a result, because, consequently, hence
- *To repeat, summarize, or conclude:* in brief, in other words, in short, therefore (*use sparingly:* to summarize, in conclusion, in summary)

TRANSITIONAL SENTENCES AND TOPIC SENTENCES

Transitional sentences link one paragraph to the next. This is especially important when a new paragraph indicates a small shift in focus. A strong transitional sentence helps clarify both the new topic and the shift. Don't overdo it, though; sometimes a simple "however," will do the trick:

Overdone transition: I have just been talking about obvious reasons why people don't get involved in emergencies. Now I am going to discuss less obvious psychological factors."

Strong transition: "There are, however, other, less obvious factors which influence the decision to get involved in emergency situations."