

Transitions

Transitions in expository writing are words and phrases that writers use to:

- ◆ introduce new key/star ideas
- ◆ tie ideas together
- ◆ signal a change
- ◆ make connections

Transitions are yellow when you apply the Traffic Light colors. Yellow means “slow down” and introduce another key/star idea – another reason, detail, or fact.

- ◆ Transitions help writers organize their ideas and information.
- ◆ Transitions help readers see the organization and understand what they are reading.

- ◆ Transitions can be concrete and obvious.
 - Specific words and phrases
- ◆ Transitions can be subtle, less obvious, and abstract.
 - Synonyms, pronouns, emphasis, and repetition

In a multiparagraph essay or report, these “yellow” sentences are called Transition Topic Sentences.

Transition Topic Sentences are usually the first sentences in the body paragraphs.

Narrative transitions are different. Narrative transitions indicate time (e.g., early in the morning, after a few weeks, throughout the day, the following morning) or place (near the house, outside the fence, by the front door).

- ◆ Use narrative transitions in expository writing when you are retelling an event or explaining a sequence of events.



Traffic Light Color Coding

Writing a Paragraph

The three colors of the traffic light help me remember how to write a simple paragraph. First, I use green to get me going. My topic sentence is green; it tells the reader what I am going to prove, going to explain, going to describe, or going to share. Next, the yellow reminds me to slow down and support my topic with good reasons, interesting facts, and well-described details. I introduce my reasons, details, or facts with transitions. Finally, I see the red and it reminds me to stop. Red examples, explanations, evidence, and events bring my paragraph to life. My conclusion, of course, is green because I go back to my topic and use my last sentence to remind the reader of the topic.

Transition Sets

One Another Finally	First Next At last	First of all, The second A third	First Second Third
One Also Another Finally	Start by Next Then Finally	Initially Then After Later	In the spring In the summer In the fall In the winter
My first choice My second choice	First of all More importantly	A good An even better The best	One important Equally important
During the week On the weekend	With my friends With my family On my own	I first heard I also heard	One Another
One example Another example A third example	In the beginning As By the time Then	One good choice Another choice The best choice	Early each morning Throughout the day In the evening
To begin After that Then Next Finally	One example A better example The best example	One difference A second difference The most obvious difference	Before winter break During winter break After winter break

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Transitions for Different Purposes

◆ Introduce new ideas.

◆ Connect key/star ideas (reasons, details, or facts).

Basic Transitions Sets

One • The other

One • Another

First of all • Also

To begin • Next

One • Equally important

First of all • Next • The final

One example • Another example

A good example • A better example

An important • An equally important

A good • A better • The best

To begin • Then • Consequently

One way • Another way • A final method

Initially • Then • After that

A bad • A worse • The worst

To begin • At the same time • Finally

First of all • Besides • In addition

Transition Words for Showing Place or Location

Near Outside

Beside Inside

On top of Behind

Between Next to

Across from By

Throughout

To the right of

On the left side

Transition Words for Showing Time

Before After

During Later

Until Then

Meanwhile

As soon as

Sometimes

Transitions Words for Showing Alike or Different

Similar to

Unlike

Equal to

On the other hand

Likewise

Opposite from

A similar

In contrast

Another

Different from

The same as

But

Transitions Words for Making a Point

For example

An example of

For instance

As well as

In other words

The most important

Furthermore

Using Transitions Effectively

Example 1

Oppressed people deal with their oppression in three characteristic ways. **One way** is acquiescence: the oppressed resign themselves to their doom . . . **A second way** that oppressed people sometimes deal with oppression is to resort to physical violence and corroding hatred . . . **The third way** open to oppressed people in their quest for freedom is the way of nonviolent resistance. . . .

“Ways of Meeting Oppression”
—Martin Luther King Jr.

Example 2

Historians have long been fascinated by the fall of the Roman Empire and the causes of the fall. Although at one time most historians blamed the invasion of barbarians for Rome’s collapse, a more careful study shows that Rome had long contained the seeds of its own destruction. **For one thing**, the economy of Rome was in serious disorder. Historian Max Weber argues that the decline of slavery and cities coupled with the development of self-sufficient manors left the city-based governments in poverty. **At the same time**, wealthy Romans indulged in unheard-of luxury, widening the gap between the social classes. **Another historian**, Mikhail Rostovtzeff, adds to the causes of Rome’s collapse an intellectual crisis. He claims that the influx of conquered nationalities “barbarized” Rome, sapping it of its intellectual vigor. **Perhaps most important**, Rome’s political structure was in disarray. Uncertainty over who held the ruling power, the people or the nobles in the Senate, led to revolutions and massacres. Although no one of these forces could have toppled the great empire alone, the combination of internal weaknesses left the Empire defenseless against the final blow of the barbarian invaders.

“The Fall of Rome”
— from *Heath Grammar and Composition*

Using Transitions Effectively

<p style="text-align: center;">Vary Transitions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't fall into the <i>first, second, third</i> trap. These three words are ideal for some paragraphs and essays, but they do not work all of the time. • Experiment with different transition sets. • Look for and add new words and phrases to the transition lists.
<p style="text-align: center;">Bury Transitions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes a transition works best as the first word(s) in the sentence, but often the sentence will sound better if the transition is buried. <p>Okay <u>Second</u>, the pioneers were unprepared to deal with the harsh winters.</p> <p>Better The pioneers who settled in Nebraska were <u>also</u> unprepared for the harsh winters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burying the transition does not always improve the sentence. Read sentences aloud to hear what sounds best.
<p style="text-align: center;">First and First of all,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes a sentence (and the entire paragraph) sounds better if “First” or “First of all” is dropped. Because the first supporting sentence is so close to the topic sentence, it may not need an obvious transition like “First” and “First of all.” • Use “First” or “First of all” in the draft to help with organization, but drop the word in the final copy.

Obvious and Subtle Transitions

Using Obvious Transitions

Rocks

Rocks are divided into three classes. **One** form of rock is called sedimentary because it is formed of sediment. This means that there are layers in the rock. Pieces of other rock, decayed plants, and bones have been pressed together over time and become sedimentary rock. Gypsum and sandstone are sedimentary rocks. **Another** type of rock, called igneous, is formed from magma that has hardened and cooled. Magma comes from volcanoes. Granite is an igneous rock. **A third** type of rock is metamorphic rock. Metamorphic rock was once sedimentary or igneous but has been changed over a long period of time. The change in the rock could have been caused by pressure or heat. Quartz is a good example of metamorphic rock. All three types of rocks can be found in most neighborhoods.

Using Subtle Transitions

Quitting Isn't Easy

Any smoker who makes the decision to quit smoking deserves a pat on the back. Smoking cigarettes is an addiction; stopping is a challenge. **A problem** that smokers face is the fear of letting go of what seems like a constant companion or friend. Many smokers habitually smoke cigarettes after meals, with coffee, or in the car. Change in habits like these becomes demanding. By far, the toughest **hurdle** to overcome is the physical craving for the drug, nicotine. The smoker's blood and body chemistry change and the urge to smoke in specific places and at particular times is powerful. In the beginning and for several months, it is important to have substitutes for cigarettes available. Drinking healthy liquids such as water, juices, or low-fat fruit smoothies may defer the need to smoke. Certainly, there is no quick way to quit smoking. Those who try deserve support and encouragement.

Using Obvious and Subtle Transitions

Example 1

Africa's Deserts

Africa's two major deserts, the Sahara and the Kalahari, are not alike. One difference is their size. The Sahara "stretches across North Africa" covering an area of more than 3.5 million square miles. In comparison, the Kalahari, found in the southern part of Africa, is an area of only 120,000 square miles. Another difference is the land. The Sahara is a subtropical desert with miles of barren land. In some parts of this desert, the sun shines more than ten hours a day. Some call the Sahara a wasteland; others have become wealthy because of the gas and oil found in the area. The land on the Kalahari is covered mostly with grass and woodland. Some areas in southwest Kalahari are flat and barren. Some wild animals live in this region. Not many people live in the Kalahari. Most are nomads.

Don't Know Much About Geography
Kenneth C. Davis

Example 2

Courage to Learn to Read

Before the Civil War it was against the law in some parts of this country for Blacks to learn to read or write. Some slave owners thought that if Blacks were able to read and write, they would be difficult to control. One slave from Maryland who ignored the law and found a way to become a reader was Frederick Douglass. In his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, he describes the risks that he took so that he could learn to read. Frederick started by learning the alphabet from the wife of the slave owner. She wanted to teach him to read, but her husband discovered what she was doing and put an end to the lessons. Frederick, however, did not give up. On a visit to town he made a plan to make a trade with some boys playing on the street. He had been sent to town on errands by his master. He watched the boys at play and eventually convinced them to take his bread in return for lessons about reading. The most dangerous risk that he took was copying someone else's writing. When no one was watching, Frederick copied the school work that the master's son had completed. His determination to succeed gave Frederick Douglass the skills he needed to escape to freedom and tell the world about the evils of slavery.

Obvious and Subtle Transitions

Transitions can be obvious and concrete — familiar words that are easy to pick out on a page. Because they are so clear, they help your readers understand your ideas.

Transitions can be subtle, abstract, and not so obvious — made by using synonyms (words that mean the same thing) and by emphasizing words or phrases.

One is not better than the other. Writers choose transitions to fit their purpose and audience.

Using Obvious Transitions

Big River

In the play *Big River* Huck Finn shows his courage. One way that he showed his courage was the way he dealt with his pap. He knew how to handle his pap in different situations even when his father chased him... Leaving his pap also took a lot of courage... A third time that he showed courage was when he played dead just to help his friend Jim. He was taking a big chance of getting caught...

Using Subtle Transitions

Big River

In the play *Big River* Huck Finn shows his courage. Early in the play Huck had to be courageous when he tried to live with and understand his pap. Huck's pap was violent and unpredictable... Leaving his pap took a different kind of courage... Later on Huck showed courage when he did all he could to protect a friend. He knew that he was taking a big chance when he let Jim, a runaway slave, join him...

Using Transitions

<p>Transition Words</p>	<p>When I purchased my new car, I asked two questions. <u>First</u>, I wanted information about the warranty. <u>Next</u>, I was concerned about the new air bag system.</p>
<p>Transitional Phrases</p>	<p>The salesman explained the safety features in the car. <u>First of all</u>, he demonstrated the anti-lock brakes and gave his customers the chance to try them. <u>In addition</u>, he told them how the air bags worked. <u>Most importantly</u>, he described the adult and infant seat belts.</p>
<p>Transition Sets</p>	<p>My neighbor Bill wanted a fancy sports car, but he knew that he needed a car that fit his budget. <u>First</u>, he checked the want ads. <u>Second</u>, he asked friends and family to watch for good used cars. <u>Third</u>, he called local used car dealerships.</p>
<p>Transition by Repeating a Word</p>	<p>Drivers have many responsibilities. <u>Drivers</u> must be careful. <u>Drivers</u> should make sure their cars are safe. <u>Drivers</u> are required to know the laws. <u>Drivers</u> must realize they share the road with thousands of other drivers.</p>
<p>Transition by Repeating a Phrase</p>	<p>Driving in the mountains can be quite challenging. <u>In the summer</u>, drivers must watch for other motorists who daydream while they enjoy the scenery. <u>In the fall</u>, drivers must watch for deer, elk, and hunters. <u>In the winter</u>, snow and ice make driving a challenge. <u>In the spring</u>, heavy rains can slow down mountain drivers.</p>
<p>Transition by Using Pronouns</p>	<p>Asking Grandmother to give up her driver’s license was not easy; however, everyone in the family agreed it was necessary. <u>Grandmother</u> was losing her hearing. <u>She</u> had a difficult time backing the car out of the garage. <u>She</u> was sometimes confused about directions and <u>her</u> medications often made her drowsy.</p>
<p>Transition by Using Synonyms</p>	<p>Teens are often excited about owning their first cars, but just as often they are surprised by the cost of maintaining their cars. <u>Young people</u> underestimate the price of car insurance. <u>Teenagers</u> are not aware of how expensive car repairs can be. And <u>high school students</u> may not budget for expenses like new tires.</p>

Transitions in Reports and Essays

In reports and essays, use Transition Topic Sentences (in bold print below) to start body paragraphs. Transitions are combined with the key/star ideas from the informal outline to create these sentences. The purpose of the Transition Topic Sentences is to present the main ideas that support the topic sentence.

E.T.

Some movies have entertained children and families for years. One of those that will continue to do so for generations to come is now a classic film. Directed by Steven Spielberg and written by Melissa Mathison, *E.T., The Extra-Terrestrial*, delights children and adults alike.

First of all, the movie *E.T.* is a charming science-fiction mystery. When the movie starts, a circular spaceship lands in a forest of tall pine trees shrouded in fog. The spaceship eventually leaves. But one of its creatures is left behind. The creature runs through the forest crying and trying to evade a group of investigators. The rest of the story involves the investigators and their search for this friendly and funny extra-terrestrial being.

***E.T., The Extra-Terrestrial* will stay popular because it is about friendship.** Not far from the forest, a young boy named Elliott lives in a suburban home with his family. His father and mother are separated. He lives with his mother, younger sister, Gertie, and his older brother, Michael. Elliot encounters E.T., tries to hide and protect him, and discovers ways to communicate with the strange-looking creature. The two become close friends.

E.T.'s antics are another reason people love the movie. Hilarious scenes include: E.T. discovering candy and soda pop for the first time and the children dressing E.T. to go out trick-or-treating. There are many reasons to laugh when little sister, Gertie, teaches E.T. to talk and dresses him up like a doll.

The movie has an element of drama and tragedy. E.T.'s desire to make contact with home touches everyone. E.T. becomes ill. He literally becomes homesick. His new friends create a contraption that will help E.T. "phone home." In the process, E. T. spends time outdoors near water and gets sicker.

The bond between Elliott and E.T. is obvious. It is most obvious in scenes when E.T. heals the cut on Elliott's finger and when Elliott cares enough about E.T. to let him go.

Some films have it all and will never grow old. *E. T.* is just such a movie.

Transitions

Transitions in a Narrative

...**After a time** they began to shed their knapsacks. Men extricated themselves from thick shirts. Presently few carried anything but their necessary clothing, blankets, haversacks, canteens, and arms and ammunition. “You can now eat and shoot,” said the tall soldier to the youth. “That’s all you want to do.”

There was a sudden change from the ponderous infantry of theory to the light and speedy infantry of practice. But the regiment...

Presently the army again sat down to think...

One gray dawn, however, the youth was kicked in the leg by the tall soldier, and then, before he was entirely awake, he found himself running down the road...

The Red Badge of Courage
Stephen Crane

Transitions in Expository Writing

In early 1986, the United States launched a military operation against the headquarters of Muammar al-Qaddafi of Libya. The United States believed that Qaddafi was supporting acts of terrorism against Americans in Europe. Qaddafi escaped harm in that raid, but after it, he stopped working as openly against the United States. **Powell played a major role in that operation**, which was popular at home and in the rest of the world.

Powell played a minor role in another operation, this time one that was political, not military. It was a secret plan to sell weapons to Iran in exchange for the release of American hostages being held in Lebanon by terrorists with ties to Iran.

Colin Powell: A Biography
Jim Haskins