

## STYLE SHEET

### Writing Transition Sentences

*Suzanne Hall Johnson, RN, MN*

*Transition sentences help the reader move from point to point. They clarify a key point, so the reader can distinguish main points from specific details in an article or book. In this article, you will be able to practice writing transition sentences.*

Because nurses are used to recording details in nursing documentation using a phrase format rather than paragraph format, they are not used to writing transition sentences. This shows in some nurses' manuscripts where details are numerous, but the key points are hidden.

#### Final Transition Sentences

Transition sentences are usually placed in the beginning or end of each section of text. A final transition sentence comes at the end of a section of text to summarize the key point of that section. Because these transition sentences usually summarize the last point and introduce the next point, they come before the next heading. Here is an example of a transition sentence that comes at the end of a section of text (the transition sentence is underlined):

##### Family Fatigue

Family members who stay with ill relatives in the hospital often ignore their own needs. They forget to go for their own meals and sit for long periods of time without exercise.

Because of this likelihood of family fatigue, the nurse needs to identify the nursing diagnosis of fatigue for these families.

##### Nursing Diagnosis of Fatigue

...

Notice in the example above that the section starts out with details and concludes with the main point. The main point "family fatigue" is not mentioned until the last sentence. This transition sentence also tells the reader that the next main point will be "nursing diagnosis." The heading that follows is not a surprise to the reader because this transition sentence led up to that point.

Final transition sentences are common in public writing. The public reader is likely to read the entire article or book, and the transition sentences help them feel accomplishment after they complete each section. In contrast, professional writing usually uses the second type of transition sentences, initial transition sentences. *(The previous section is a final transition sentence; it leads you to the next section.)*

#### Initial Transition Sentences

Initial transition sentences are placed as the first sentences in each section of text. They describe the same point as the

heading and usually use similar phrases to those in the heading. *(The first sentence of this paragraph is an initial transition sentence; it uses words similar to those in the heading.)* Authors should not assume the heading alone communicates the point. The first sentence of the text should emphasize the same point as the heading. Here is the example using initial transition sentences:

##### Family Fatigue

Family fatigue is a common problem. Family members who stay with ill relatives in the hospital, often ignore their own needs. They forget to go for their own meals and sit for long periods of time without exercise.

##### Nursing Diagnosis of Fatigue

The nurse needs to identify the nursing diagnosis of fatigue for these families...

The reader should be able to read just the text, without the headings, and still understand the main points in the manuscript. If they cannot do this, there is a skip in your point between the heading and the paragraph. This makes your writing choppy and interrupts the flow of ideas for the reader.

The reason professional writers use initial transition sentences frequently is that the busy professional may not necessarily read every sentence in an article or book. Busy nurses read articles and books very selectively. They skim some sections, while they read others in detail. It is usually the heading and initial sentence in each section that clues the reader into the depth to which she or he needs to read the material.

#### Writing Transition Sentences

Practice writing an initial transition sentence in the example below for an article on interviews with nurses who resign. The transition sentence should emphasize the same point as that in the heading which precedes it.

##### Complete an Exit Interview

---

Ask open-ended questions, so the nurse gives you details on why she or he has decided to leave. Use an interview sheet to record the information, so it can be analyzed later for similarity between cases.

(Answer: Any sentence which emphasizes the point that the reader should complete an exit interview is correct. An example is: "The nursing leader completes an exit interview on each nurse who leaves the facility" or even more directly "Complete an exit interview on each nurse who leaves the facility." If you mentioned "exit interview," but did not mention the reader needs to take the action to complete it, your transition sentence misses part of the main point described in the heading.)

Add a transition sentence for an article on weaning of patients in the example below:

##### Assess Patient for Hypoxia

---

Symptoms of hypoxia for patients during weaning include restlessness and irritability. Many times these subtle behavior changes alert you to air-hunger even more than changes in vital signs.

(Answer: Any sentence which emphasizes the point that the reader should assess the patient for cues of hypoxia is good. An example is: "The nurse completes an assessment to identify the patient's symptoms of hypoxia.")

### Editing Transition Sentences

After completing a manuscript, edit your transition sentences. I like to mark the transition sentences with a highlighter on a draft copy. If I cannot find a sentence to highlight in a section, I know I left out that transition sentence and need to write one. Next, I read just the highlighted transition sentences to make sure the main ideas are clear and in the right order. Transition sentences help the reader to understand your main point. — *Suzanne Hall Johnson, RN, MN, Editor of Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing, Recruitment & Retention Report, and Nurse Author & Editor.*

## BOOK SHELF



Stedman's/25 for WordPerfect™. Williams & Wilkins, 428 East Preston Street, Baltimore, MD 21202, (410) 528-4000.

Stedman's/25 for WordPerfect is a medical dictionary which can be added to the software's spell-checker providing over 160,000 medical terms from Stedman's 25th Edition Medical Dictionary. The program is easy to install. It took less than 10 minutes to have it up and running. It is installed right into the WordPerfect spelling dictionary. Once it is installed, you can use your WordPerfect spell checker just like always. Medical words which are alternatives for the misspelled words come on screen along with the original WordPerfect word suggestions.



Grammatik 5. Reference Software International, 330 Townsend Street, Suite 123, San Francisco, CA 94107, (800) 872-9933.

Grammatik 5 is the latest version of Reference Software's popular grammar and style checker. This program is designed to go beyond correcting errors and helps its users write more effectively. It is able to proofread for grammar and style errors, phrase errors, and mechanical problems. Plus, it offers in-depth information on grammar and style questions and explains writing problems simply and clearly.

Grammatik proved to be easy to install and simple to use, very much like running a spell checker, but you have four options in how it checks the document: Full interactive, mark only, read only, and statistics only. Using the fully

interactive option, Grammatik highlights trouble spots in context, tells the nature of the rule in question, offers advice, and whenever possible, suggests a replacement.

My only difficulty with the program is that it cannot ignore a "problem" that has been passed over before the sentence is changed. For example, a single sentence will often contain more than one trouble spot, but each time you make a change and go on, the program rechecks the entire sentence you just corrected, not just the spot where you made a change. This means that any proper names the spell checker does not recognize, or passive voice that was left intentionally, etc., triggers the checker again and has to be passed over a second time.

Upon completion of the proofreading session, or upon request for a statistics only check, Grammatik offers several screens of summary information about your document. The first screen reveals the grade level, reading ease score, and percentage of sentences that use passive voice, as well as figures for the average sentence length, average word length, and average paragraph length. The best thing about this screen is that it also offers interpretations of the data, such as, "Avg. sentence length: 20.2 words - most readers could easily understand sentences of this length." Grammatik also offers graphic representation of the grade level, reading ease, average number of sentences per paragraph, and average number of words per sentence. These bar graphs compare your document to the Gettysburg Address, a Hemingway short story, and a life insurance policy. (But, these standards can be customized.)

Grammatik 5 for DOS supports 25 word processors, including WordPerfect™, WordStar™, and Microsoft Word™. It requires an IBM or compatible PC with 80286 or faster microprocessor, DOS 3.0 or greater, 640K RAM and a hard drive. The suggested retail price is \$99. — Erica A. Johnson.



Huth, Edward J. How to Write and Publish Papers in the Medical Sciences. 2nd Ed. Williams & Wilkins, 1990, 252 pages, Hardback, \$29.95.

"How to" books on professional and scientific writing are ubiquitous and a large part of their content is applicable across-the-board to several fields. So why single out this book as a resource? Quite simply, it is among the best, if not *the* best, of books to assist authors (including nurse authors) seeking to publish in medical science journals. The author, a physician, incorporates only a few examples from nursing and pharmacy (it is unclear what he considers to be the medical sciences), and the thrust is almost entirely on medical writing. Nevertheless, he provides a wealth of information written in a style that is exceptionally clear, readable, and mercifully free of exhortations about why one should write for publication.

The author's discussion of the format for review papers, research reports, case reports, case-series analyses,