

# Campus Academic Resource Program

## Transitions

This handout will:

- Define transitions
- Explain the purpose of transitions
- Offer a list of transitive words and phrases for writers' use
- Explain how to use transitions
- Give tips for how to tell if you need transitions
- Offer practice examples

### I. Definition:

*Transitions are indicative and linking words that create relationships between words, sentences, and paragraphs.* They tell readers how to think about the phrases that follow them.

**Example:**

*I love tea; **however**, I would never turn down a cup of coffee if offered.*

The transitive word “however” indicates to the reader that the writer is going to talk about a new topic. Because the transition occurs within the same sentence, the reader knows that the new topic is still related to the first one.

### II. The Purpose of Transitions in Essays:

a. *Within sentences:*

- i. Transitions are signaling words in sentences; they signal the relationship between one clause (part of a sentence) and another.

**Example:**

I am a decent cook, **and yet**, when confronted with any kind of edible sea creature, I suddenly lose confidence in my own competence.

- ii. Transitions do not have to be between two clauses; they often come at the beginnings of sentences as well.

**Example:**

**Despite** my decent skills as a cook, when confronted with any kind of edible sea creature, I suddenly lose confidence in my own competence.

b. *Within paragraphs:*

- i. On the sentence level, transitions explain relationships between clauses in sentences; however, in paragraphs they explain relationships between entire sentences or groups of sentences.

1. **Example:**

I think that I am intimidated by cooking seafood, because of its delicacy and its price. I am not used to preparing something that needs to be carefully sliced and cooked for a set amount of time. **Of course**, my lack of skill probably stems from my lack of sophistication. **As far as I am concerned**, if I have to do more than hack food up with a knife and throw it in a pan with garlic, salt and pepper, then it is not worth the struggle.

**Of course** indicates that there is an obvious issue in the previous sentence; the rest of the sentence explains that issue.

This sentence starts with a transition which indicates that the author is going to elaborate on particular point in the previous sentence, that is, their “lack of sophistication.”

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- c. *Within the essay as a whole:*
- i. The use of transitions throughout a paper contributes to an over-arching idea called *flow*.
    1. *Flow is dictated by the way parts of a paper work together to create an intelligible, logical, easy-to-understand argument.* Transitions are vital in creating flow because they help readers make the logical leaps necessary to understand an argument or explanation.

*Remember that transitions are not limited to single words or short phrases, although those tend to be the most common and easiest ways to create flow.* From paragraph to paragraph, you may have entire transition sentences, and in longer papers you may even have transition paragraphs. The general idea is that you want to make sure all of your points flow into each other; more simply, ensure that the points you make are explicitly related to each other.

### III. Transitions by the relationship they indicate:

Many of these transitions can be used for multiple effects. For example, “however” can be used to describe a compare/contrast relationship and a concession. Do not feel obligated to use these words only for the purposes under which they are listed.

#### Addition:

Furthermore  
Secondly  
In addition  
Equally important  
Besides  
Next  
Moreover

#### Compare/Contrast:

On the other hand  
Vis-à-vis  
Although  
Conversely  
However  
Similarly

#### Cause/Effect:

On account of  
Because  
Since  
Therefore  
Thus

#### Summarize:

To summarize  
In sum  
In short  
In summary  
To conclude  
Thus  
As a result

#### Time:

Immediately  
First (second, etc.)  
Next  
Previously  
Meanwhile  
Simultaneously

#### Intensification:

Indeed  
Of course  
In fact  
Even

#### Concession:

Of course  
Granted  
On the other hand  
However  
It is true  
Although

#### Illustration:

For example  
For instance  
In this case  
Specifically  
To illustrate  
In this situation

#### Clarification:

That is (to say)  
In other words  
To explain  
To clarify  
More simply

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### IV. How to make sure you are using the appropriate transition:

- a. Write out the sentences or phrases that you want to connect first.
- b. Think about how you want the two sentences to relate. Then, look at the phrases you wrote out and see how and where you can insert a transition to establish that relationship.

Remember that transitions do not always have to occur at the beginning of a sentence; they can occur at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence and even between sentences.

#### i. Example:

1. Sentence 1: Freshly caught fish taste better than processed fish.
2. Sentence 2: Canned fish is cheaper than fresh fish.

The first sentence establishes an idea about taste. The second sentence presents an idea about cost. Sentence one states that fresh fish is the better option, but sentence two claims that processed fish is a better option.

#### ii. Possible Solutions:

**Example:** contrast transition:

1. Freshly caught fish taste better than processed fish. **However**, canned fish is cheaper than fresh fish.

Because the two sentences are referring to the same topic (processed versus unprocessed fish), but viewing them from different perspectives (one from a taste perspective and one from a cost perspective), it becomes clear that the writer is trying to contrast the two options.

**Example:** concession transition:

2. **It is true** that freshly caught fish taste better than processed fish, but canned fish is cheaper than fresh fish.

In this case, the writer wants to qualify or make a concession to the first point with an exceptional example, that is, to say that fresh fish is better in general, except in the area of cost.

### V. Signs that you need a transition:

- a. Sentences feel “choppy,” or abrupt—they go from one subject to another without giving any indication of tone or subject change.

#### i. Example:

Abrupt: Fish are really weird. Their eyes are glassy and their mouths just gape open all the time. They taste good. I like fish best when it is in sushi.

Smooth: Fish are really weird. Their eyes are glassy and their mouths just gape open all the time. They taste good, **though**. I like fish best when it is in sushi.

The abrupt example discusses two topics. First, it talks about how fish are weird and why. Then, the topic shifts to how fish taste and how the author likes to eat them. Because the first topic discusses a negative attribute of fish and the second discusses

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a positive, you can deduce that the second sentence is qualifying the first and so you use a qualifying transition: though.

b. You can not quickly tell how one sentence relates to another.

i. **Example:**

Relation Unclear: Fish are weird. They taste good.

Relation Clear: Fish are weird. **On the other hand**, they taste good.

In the first example, the two topics unrelated. Besides the topic, nothing connects them: the adjectives are not similar, the first sentence does not describe the second, and the second sentence does not elaborate on the first. By adding in a transition (see the second example), you can create a relationship- in this case, a conceding relationship. This sentence now argues that fish are weird overall, but they do have one redeeming quality and that is that they taste good.

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#### VI. Practice:

Directions: Read the following paragraphs and add in the appropriate transitions. Use the word bank below to help you, there may be extra words left over.

<u>Word Bank</u>			
Meanwhile	Maybe	Moreover	For instance
Besides	Despite	Perhaps	In fact
For example	On the other hand	However	Of course
Since	In short	Although	So

*Seafood is one of my favorite foods, but I just cannot seem to cook it properly. For the last year, it has not mattered what it was: mussels, fish, clams, or shrimp—it all ended up burnt or undercooked in some way or another. (1) \_\_\_\_\_, this year, I have once again begun experimenting with the dastardly task. (2) \_\_\_\_\_, the other week, I actually went out of my way to buy fresh fish instead of the frozen kind. (3) \_\_\_\_\_, I burned it, but the effort was there! And I feel like my motivation has not waned, (4) \_\_\_\_\_ this week, I have once again acquired one of the scaly beasts.*

*(5) \_\_\_\_\_, I should clarify: it is not that I cannot cook; it is just that fish requires much keener eye for preparation than I currently have. (6) \_\_\_\_\_, there is a very small period of time between fish being undercooked, perfectly cooked, and overcooked. Chicken is not nearly as finicky; there is pink chicken, not-pink chicken, and burnt chicken. It has a color diagram built in. Fish, (7) \_\_\_\_\_, requires very careful examination because, supposedly, it should be cooked until just barely opaque. I do not understand what “barely opaque” even means! There is opaque and there is not-opaque and nothing in between, (8) \_\_\_\_\_, the fact of the matter is that I need to develop a sharper eye for detail.*

*(9) \_\_\_\_\_, despite my motivation to become more skilled at preparing seafood, it is not an overly practical skill for me to currently invest in. Fish is too expensive and requires more technical skill than I am interested in acquiring. (10) \_\_\_\_\_ one day, when I have more time and money, I can put forth the efforts to properly prepare seafood; (11) \_\_\_\_\_, for now, I will continue to cook my chicken and my pork and will be satisfied with that.*

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#### Answer Key:

1. **However or although.** The idea of the previous sentence and this sentence presents two ideas that contradict each other. The writer says they cannot cook seafood in the first sentence, but they also say they are doing it anyways in the second one. Therefore, the relationship is contrasting.
2. **For example or for instance.** The sentence is describing a specific example of how the writer is beginning to experiment with cooking seafood.
3. **Of course.** The sentence is qualifying the writer's failure by emphasizing that the most important part of the sentence's idea is that they *tried* to cook seafood.
4. **Since or in fact.** "This week, I have once again acquired one of the scaly beasts." can be understood as having a cause-and-effect relationship with "And I feel like my motivation has not waned," in which case, the word "since" would be sufficient. However, it can also be understood as an emphasis statement because it can be used to intensify the previous clause. In this case, "in fact" would be appropriate.
5. **Maybe, perhaps, however, or although.** This first clause presents a qualifying situation wherein the writer wants to make it apparent that their inadequacy at cooking fish does not apply to their cooking abilities in general.
6. **For example or for instance.** This sentence is expanding on the idea that "fish requires much keener eye for preparation" in the previous sentence by giving examples of what could go wrong.
7. **On the other hand or however.** This sentence is contrasting fish's preparation requirements to chicken's and thus needs a contrasting transition.
8. **In short, perhaps, or maybe.** This concluding clause can be understood as either as a summarizing sentence (the conclusion of the entire paragraph), or a qualifying sentence (by presenting a possible explanation for the writer's lack of skill).
9. **Moreover or in short.** This paragraph is contributing additional reasons for the writer's logic for not cooking seafood; therefore, "moreover" would be sufficient. It is also summarizing the arguments made in the previous paragraph, so a summarizing transition, such as "in short" would also be appropriate.
10. **Perhaps or maybe.** This sentence is specifying a situation in which the writer thinks preparing seafood would be possible; thus this is a qualifying sentence and requires such a transition.
11. **Meanwhile.** The clause that follows this transition, "for now, I will continue to cook my chicken and my pork and will be satisfied with that," specifies a time period, so "meanwhile" is the most appropriate transition.

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Work Cited

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