



Transitional Words and Phrases

Defined: “Words or phrases that help carry a thought from one sentence to another, from one idea to another, or from one paragraph to another” (Purdue OWL “Transitional Devices”).¹

...But WHY use them?

In short, to help guide your readers!

In long: “Transitional devices link sentences and paragraphs together smoothly so that there are no abrupt jumps or breaks between ideas” (Purdue OWL “Transitional Devices”).

By transitioning between your ideas, you can help your audience follow along. Not only does it show credibility, but it makes your writing accessible to a wider range (consider readers outside of your major!). Additionally, it lessens your risk of miscommunicating.

The Purdue Online Writing Lab offers the following common transitions within a handful of **categories**, and how they may cue your readers to the direction you’re taking as the writer:

To **ADD**:

*To expand the range of a point you’ve already begun making:

- | | | |
|---------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| - and | - further | - what’s more |
| - again | - furthermore | - moreover |
| - and then | - nor | - in addition |
| - besides | - too | - first (second, etc.) |
| - equally important | - next | |
| - finally | - lastly | |

Ex.

*Transitional words and phrases can help you direct your readers. **Furthermore**, using transitional devices well in a paper helps establish your credibility as a writer.*

To **COMPARE**:

*To compare a point you’re about to make with one that you’ve already established:

¹ A more comprehensive overview of transitional words and phrases can be found on the Purdue OWL page titled “Transitional Devices”

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| - whereas | - where | - conversely |
| - but | - compared to | - meanwhile |
| - yet | - up against | - after all |
| - on the other hand | - balanced against | - in contrast |
| - however | - vis-à-vis | - although this may be true |
| - nevertheless | (*meaning “in | |
| - on the contrary | relation to”) | |
| - by comparison | - although | |

Ex.

*Transitional phrases consist of several words. **On the contrary**, transitional words shoulder the task as (predictably) only one word.*

To **PROVE**:

*To further support a point you’ve already begun making:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| - because | - evidently | - in fact |
| - for | - furthermore | - in addition |
| - since | - moreover | - in any case |
| - for the same reason | - besides | - that is |
| - obviously | - indeed | |

Ex.

*Using transitional words and phrases can help the flow of your paper, **because** smooth transitions prevent the appearance of abrupt jumps in your logic.*

To **SHOW EXCEPTION**:

*To show an exception to a point you’re making, so to further distinguish it:

- | | | |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------|
| - yet | - nevertheless | - of course |
| - still | - in spite of | - once in a while |
| - however | - despite | - sometimes |

Ex.

*Transitional words and phrases help writers join ideas within their argument. **However**, they should only be used to join ideas that logically pair well together.*

To **SHOW TIME**:

*Showing the place in time of a point you’re making, so to further distinguish it:

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| - immediately | - finally | - formerly |
| - thereafter | - then | - first (second, etc.) |
| - soon | - later | - next |
| - after a few hours | - previously | - and then |

Ex.

*Once you establish your first idea, **then** you can transition into the next.*

To REPEAT:

*To reaffirm a point you have already made, so to consider something new about it:

- in brief
- as I have noted
- as I have said
- as has been noted

Ex.

*Transitional words and phrases are an important asset in accessible papers. **As I have noted**, they can help readers process your ideas with greater ease.*

To EMPHASIZE:

*To emphasize a point you've already begun making, or to lead emphatically into a new idea:

- definitely
- positively
- never
- extremely
- naturally
- emphatically
- obviously
- surprisingly
- unquestionably
- in fact
- always
- without a doubt
- indeed
- forever
- certainly
- in any case
- perennially
- undeniably
- absolutely
- eternally
- without reservation

Ex:

*Accessibility is an important consideration when writing papers. This point is **absolutely** the case in the IWU Ames Writing Center.*

To SHOW SEQUENCE:

*To frame your point within a sequence of events:

- first, second, third,
and so forth
- at this point
- simultaneously
- A, B, C, and so forth
- after
- concurrently
- next
- afterward
- thus
- then
- subsequently
- therefore
- following this
- finally
- hence
- at this time
- consequently
- next
- now
- previously
- and then
- before this
- soon

Ex.

*You might add transitional words and phrases to your paper during an editing stage, **after** writing the first draft.*

To GIVE an EXAMPLE:

*To further elaborate on a point you've begun making by tying in an example:

- for example
- for instance
- in this case
- in another case
- on this occasion
- in this situation
- take the case of
- to demonstrate
- to illustrate
- as an illustration

Ex.

*Transitional device categories are not binding, and are context-dependent. **Take the case of "TO ADD" and "TO SHOW TIME,"** where the transitional word "next" appears under both headings.*

To SUMMARIZE or CONCLUDE:

*To summarize or conclude your point in the aftermath of making it:

- in brief
- on the whole
- summing up
- to conclude
- in conclusion
- as I have shown
- as I have said
- hence
- therefore
- accordingly
- thus
- as a result
- consequently

Ex.

***On the whole,** transitional words and phrases are a necessary asset of many papers, and if you acquire a basic understanding of them, it will prove useful!*

To SHOW CAUSE:

*To explain the cause of a point you're about to make or have already begun making:

- because
- for that reason
- on account of
- since

To SHOW EFFECT:

*To show the effect of a point you're about to make or have already made:

- therefore
- consequently
- accordingly
- thus
- hence
- as a result

To SHOW PURPOSE:

*To show the purpose of your point, so to assure of its importance and urgency:

- in order that
- so that

- to that end
- to this end

- for this purpose

To **QUALIFY**:

*To distinguish your point by specifying its nuances through exceptions:

- almost
- nearly
- probably

- perhaps
- maybe
- although

- never
- always
- frequently

To **CONCEDE**:

*To limit the scope of your point and avoid making claims you can't prove:

- to be sure
- granted

- of course

- it is true that

Other **TRANSITION OPTIONS**:

- **Demonstratives** (“this,” “these,” “those,” “that...”) can act as transitions.
- **Pronouns** (“they,” “their,” “his,” “her,” “it,” “its,” “our,” “your...”) can act as transitions if they clearly refer to a specific word or phrase.
- **Repetition of Key Words or Phrases** can act as transitions between sentences and paragraphs.
- **Parallel Structure** (the repetition of a sentence pattern or grammatical structure within a sentence) strengthens the relationship between and among sentences.