

Using transitions

Transitions are words such as *so*, *however*, and *thus* that signal relationships between sentences and paragraphs. Transitions help guide the reader from one idea to another.

Commonly used transitions

To signal sequence:

additionally, again, also, and then, besides, in addition, finally, first . . . second . . . third, furthermore, last, lastly, moreover, next, still, too

To signal time:

after a few days, after a while, afterward, as long as, as soon as, at last, at that time, before, earlier, immediately, in the meantime, in the past, lately, later, meanwhile, now, presently, simultaneously, since, so far, soon, then, thereafter, until, when

To signal comparison:

again, also, in the same way, likewise, once more, similarly

To signal contrast:

although, but, despite, even though, however, in contrast, in spite of, instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the contrary, on the one hand . . . on the other hand, regardless, still, though, yet

To signal examples:

for example, for instance, indeed, in fact, of course, specifically, such as, the following example, to illustrate, i.e.

To signal cause and effect:

accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, for this purpose, hence, so, then, therefore, thereupon, thus, to this end

To signal place:

above, adjacent to, below, beyond, closer to, elsewhere, far, farther on, here, near, nearby, opposite to, there, to the left, to the right

To signal concession:

although it is true that, granted that, I admit that, it may appear that, naturally, of course, while

To signal clarification or explanation:

in other words, simply put, simply stated, that is to say

To signal summary, repetition, or conclusion:

as a result, as has been noted, as I have said, as mentioned earlier, as we have seen, in any event, in conclusion, in other words, in short, on the whole, therefore, to summarize

The importance of transitions

To understand how important transitions are in directing readers, try reading the following paragraph, from which all transitions have been removed.

Example paragraph WITHOUT transitions:

In “The Fly,” Katherine Mansfield tries to show us the real personality of the boss beneath his exterior. The fly helps to portray this real self. The boss goes through a range of emotions and feelings. He expresses these feelings to a small but determined fly, whom the reader realizes he unconsciously relates to his son. The author basically splits up the story into three parts, with the boss’s emotions and actions changing quite measurably. With old Woodifield, with himself, and with the fly, we see the boss’s manipulateness. Our understanding of him as a hard and cruel man grows.

If we work at it, we can figure out the relationship of these sentences to one another, for this paragraph is essentially unified by one major idea. But the lack of transitions results in an abrupt, choppy rhythm; the paragraph lurches from on detail to the next, dragging the confused reader behind. See how much easier the passage is to read and understand with transitions added.

The same paragraph WITH transitions:

In “The Fly,” Katherine Mansfield tries to show us the real personality of the boss beneath his exterior. The fly in the story’s title helps to portray this real self. In the course of the story, the boss goes through a range of emotions. At the end, he finally expresses these feelings to a small but determined fly, whom the reader realizes he unconsciously relates to his son. To accomplish her goal, the author basically splits up the story into three parts, with the boss’s emotions and actions changing measurably throughout. First with old Woodifield, then with himself, and last with the fly, we see the boss’s manipulateness. With each part, our understanding of him as a hard and cruel man grows.