

# the Writing center



## TRANSITIONS

If sentences are chair legs, transitions are glue. If you use too little glue, the legs fall off the seat and you have a pile of wood. If you use too much glue, it will squeeze out of the sides and make a mess (or glue the boards to the workbench!). You need just the right amount of transitions to cement your ideas together without overcomplicating your phrases or distracting your readers.

### Identifying Transitions

*Transitions are like conjunctions for your sentences and paragraphs.* Differentiating between “and” or “but” is vital for your sentence. Likewise, using “in addition” or “however” in appropriate places is vital, otherwise your reader might not understand if the ideas are supposed to contrast or build upon each other. Examples of common transitions will be provided at the end of this handout.

### Location, Location, Location

Placement is everything for transitions. Often the transitions that feel right when writing, sound wrong when editing. These tips for identifying the correct location for transitions will assume *you have already written* the paper or at least the section that you are editing. I will explore four questions that you could ask yourself when deciding if a transition is appropriate.

***How are the ideas connected?*** Just like conjunctions, you want to be sure that your contrasting ideas have a contrasting transition and your arguments that add information have transitions indicating this as well.

***Are there too many transitions surrounding this one?*** Using a transition to start every sentence or paragraph is too much. Rules for this would be hard to create, but reading it aloud can help you sense it. Much like varying sentence structure, transitional words and phrases must vary to keep the writing engaging for the reader.

***Are the connections obvious?*** If point 2 logically follows point 1, you don’t always need to say “then” or “therefore.” This question should be considered with the question of how many

transitional phrases you have nearby. Too many transitions and your writing becomes wordy, too few transitions and you lose clarity.

### Examples of Transitions

These transition examples will be at the sentence level because of space limitations. However, note that the principles apply at paragraph and section levels as well.

#### Example 1

The woman has a son just as the angel promised (Judg 13:24). **However**, the text does not claim that Yahweh caused her to conceive or provided her with the child. **Instead**, the child was born according to the promise of Yahweh rather than through an explicit act of God.

This example has two contrastive transitions that define the claim of the first sentence. The first transition shows what is missing from the text and the second transition shows what the text claims.

- Though these transitions are both contrastive, they are not interchangeable. “*Instead*, the text does not claim” does not fit this paragraph. The appropriate transition must be used to make the connections clear.
- These transitions are necessary, especially the second one. If you remove “however,” the paragraph is trickier to read but still logical. If you remove “instead,” the connection between the sentences is difficult to understand (and easy to misunderstand).

#### Example 2

I will argue that all Israel swore the oath in Ezra 10:5 and this fulfilled Shecaniah’s covenant proposal. **To prove this**, I will discuss the use of “chiefs” in lists in the Old Testament and the use of the term “Israel” in Ezra. **Next**, I will explain the differences between the terms “oath,” “covenant,” and “confession.” **Finally**, I will explain how Shecaniah focuses on establishing a new covenant and Ezra focuses on confession.

This example has 2 types of transitions. First, I have a purpose transition (“to prove this”) that explains how the remaining sentences relate to the topic sentence. Then I have two sequential sentences that show the order of the sections of my paper. Note that sequential transitions are not always numerical and, sometimes, it is better if they are not numerical.

## Common Transitions<sup>1</sup>

<b>Relationship Categories</b>	<b>Common Expressions</b>
Sequential	First, second, third, next, then, finally
Chronological	Before, after, later, meanwhile, concurrently,
Similarity	Likewise, in the same way, similarly, so too, also
Contrast	Contrary, however, nevertheless, despite, in contrast
Location	Here, there, above, below, inside, beyond
Cause and effect	Consequently, as a result, therefore, because
Example	For example, to illustrate, for instance, to demonstrate, specifically
Additional support	In addition, also, furthermore, moreover, again
Emphasis	In fact, indeed, undoubtedly, surely
Purpose	So that, in order to, to this end
Summary	In summary, to sum up, in short
Conclusion	To conclude, in conclusion, finally, in the end

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<sup>1</sup> For slightly different categorizations and many more examples see the publications by the writing centers of UW Madison and UNC Chapel Hill. <https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/style/transitions/>; <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/transitions/>