

## Transitional Phrases: Make Your Writing Flow

*Do you ever wonder what, exactly, your teacher means when they say your writing needs to “flow” better? One way to do that is to use various words and phrases to link your ideas together. Sprinkle them throughout your writing to ensure that your trains of thought make sense on paper, not just in your head. Let’s explore examples of transitional phrases and how to use them.*

Transitional phrases are absolutely essential to academic and nonfiction writing. Once I learned about them in my final years of high school, my papers started flowing much more smoothly, making their points much more clearly. So, I really hope this discussion helps you out.

### What are Transitional Phrases, and Why Do They Matter?

Whether or not you’re consciously aware of the term, you probably use transitional phrases fairly often in both your casual speech and your writing. Regardless, it’s helpful to have a firm understanding of what they are and how they’re used. That way, you can deliberately spice up your writing.

Basically, a transitional phrase helps you link ideas together. These links can work in a number of different ways. For instance, phrases such as *furthermore* and *moreover* can signal the continuance of an idea, perhaps by introducing another piece of evidence to support the argument. Additionally, phrases such as *likewise* and *similarly* can indicate that two points are similar, as you may have guessed. Moreover, some phrases, such as *for instance*, *for example*, and *specifically*, can help you elaborate on a point through detailed evidence. These phrases in particular can be quite helpful for setting up a quotation, an important form of evidence in most academic papers.

That’s not all transitional phrases can do, however. Others, such as *however*, *nevertheless*, and *yet*, can let you signal contrast between ideas. They are also useful for introducing a caveat you must make in your argument. Indeed, the possibilities are just about endless. Words such as *indeed* can even help you emphasize a point if used sparingly.

Seriously, the benefits of using transitional phrases are immense. To begin with, they help your writing sound more appealing and authoritative. Particularly, words such as *consequently* and *furthermore* can make you sound much smarter than you really are—it works for me!

That’s not all, however. The whole reason you use transitional phrases is to transition between ideas so they can guide the reader. They allow your thoughts to flow smoothly together, giving the reader a firm understanding of where you’re going.

In fact, transitional phrases can even guide you, the writer! Think about it. If you’re using transitional phrases, then chances are you’re also paying close attention to how your words, sentences, paragraphs, and ideas are flowing together. Therefore, if you notice a large section that’s devoid of transitional phrases, then you might want to examine whether or not you’re clearly going from point to point in a meaningful way. Are you building up your ideas or merely jumping from one random thought to another?

It is, of course, possible to overuse transitional phrases. Still, you must be aware of how greatly they can benefit your writing, academic or otherwise. With transitional phrases, the reader doesn't have to guess how sentences are related to one another: they can *know*.

So, when in doubt, use transitional phrases. They'll usually go at the beginning of a sentence. They can, however, be found in the middle of one too. In that case, they're usually surrounded by commas, but it's *also* possible that they're simply part of the sentence. Alternatively, you may want to use transitional sentences sometimes. For example, a quick "That is not the case, however" could mix things up if you've used many long sentences before it.

Overall, when your words and ideas are flowing together coherently, your paper's probably making a clear point. That's exactly what a great essay is supposed to do, so your grade will probably have a whole lot of points in it!

### **A Writing Sample with and without Transitional Phrases**

Although the section above features tons of transitional phrases to show how powerful they can be, I thought it might help you to see how they can spice up otherwise mediocre writing. So, let's look at a sample without transitional phrases, then we can add some to make the ideas flow more smoothly.

#### **Without Transitional Phrases:**

Japanese animation, commonly referred to as anime, differs from most American cartoons in a number of ways. Most anime tell a story from beginning to end, every episode leading into the next. In the typical American cartoon, the episodes can be watched in just about any order. Anime usually has a set number of episodes, letting the series end once the story has been told. American cartoons tend to run until they are no longer profitable, even if this requires churning out numerous mediocre episodes to keep them going.

Perhaps the most significant differences can be found in subject matter. While we Americans tend to view cartoons as a children's game, anime can be targeted at any age group, young or old. There are some adult cartoons here in the US, such as *Family Guy*. A fair amount of anime is willing to deal with serious topics in a mature, realistic way, something rarely seen here in the states. The Japanese series *Clannad* allows us to watch Tomoya, a high school student with a drunken father, as he attempts to regain a sense of purpose in life. With the exception of only a few movies, American animation rarely tackles such serious subjects. It is safe to conclude that anime needs to be recognized as an art form distinct from the current state of American cartoons.

#### **With Transitional Phrases:**

Japanese animation, commonly referred to as anime, differs from most American cartoons in a number of ways. To begin with, most anime tell a story from beginning to end, every episode leading into the next. This is in strong contrast to the typical American cartoon, where the episodes can be watched in just about any order. Likewise, anime usually has a set number of episodes, letting the series end once the story has been told. American

cartoons, on the other hand, tend to run until they are no longer profitable, even if this requires churning out numerous mediocre episodes to keep them going.

Perhaps the most significant differences, however, can be found in subject matter. While we Americans tend to view cartoons as a children's game, anime can be targeted at any age group, young or old. Admittedly, there are some adult cartoons here in the US, such as *Family Guy*. Yet, a fair amount of anime is willing to deal with serious topics in a mature, realistic way, something rarely seen here in the states. The Japanese series *Clannad*, for example, allows us to watch Tomoya, a high school student with a drunken father, as he attempts to regain a sense of purpose in life. With the exception of only a few movies, American animation rarely tackles such serious subjects. Overall, it is safe to conclude that anime needs to be recognized as an art form distinct from the current state of American cartoons.

The second example was much easier to read and follow, right? That's pretty funny, since it's only twenty words longer. Those transitional phrases sure go a long way. (For the record, I conjured up this sample argument simply because I knew you all would never have a reason to plagiarize it for one of your school essays. Don't worry: I like American cartoons!)

### Essential Transitional Phrases for Formal Writing

Okay, without further ado, let's get to the list of transitional phrases. This first set is especially pertinent to academic papers and other formal writing. The list, largely based on one that my AP English teacher gave me years ago, is relatively short, but it benefitted me immensely in high school and college, so I hope it serves you well too.

above all	furthermore	on the other hand
accordingly	hence	otherwise
additionally	however	overall
again	in addition	plus
also	in fact	regardless
as a result	in particular	second
at last	in short	similarly
at the outset	indeed	specifically
besides	instead	still
consequently	likewise	subsequently
conversely	meanwhile	then
equally important	moreover	therefore
eventually	nevertheless	thus
finally	next	to begin with
first	nonetheless	yet
for example	on one hand	
for instance	on the contrary	

### Notes:

- Some phrases, like *on one hand* and *on the other hand*, go hand-in-hand. Having *on one hand* without following it up with *on the other hand* would be really awkward. (However, you can probably get by with the latter phrase alone.)

- Some of these phrases are obviously more formal than others. Particularly, a *furthermore* carries much more weight than a *plus*. Use your intuition to balance everything out: don't be too stuffy or too relaxed.

- Many transitional phrases are more or less interchangeable. For example, I could've started this sentence with *for instance*, and I would've been fine. Keep this in mind while you're editing. It's usually a good idea to vary your diction as a means of avoiding repetition. In other words, don't use the same words over and over again!

### Various Transitional Phrases

Now, here's a list with more transitional phrases added to it. Many of the additions are less formal or rather uncommon. Admittedly, some of the ones on here aren't actually transitional phrases, but rather adverbs that can start sentences well. For example, "*Ordinarily*, I wouldn't consider that a transitional phrase," doesn't start with a transitional phrase, but it can help introduce an idea.

above all	conversely	hence
accordingly	consequently	hopefully
actually	definitely	however
additionally	despite	if not
after all	due to	in addition
afterward(s)	equally important	in all honesty
again	equally (any adjective)	in any case
alas	especially	in brief
all in all	even if	in conclusion
all things considered	even more so	in due course
already	even now	in effect
also	even so	in fact
although	even then	in general
anyhow	eventually	in other words
anyway	evidently	in particular
apparently	finally	in reality
as a matter of fact	first(ly)	in short
as a result	first off	in spite of
as far as I'm concerned	for another thing	in the beginning
as well	for better or for worse	in the end
at any rate	for example	in the first place
at first	for instance	in the long run
at last	for now	in the meantime
at the end of the day	for one thing	in the past
at the outset	for starters	in the same way
at the same time	for the meantime	in truth
beforehand	for the moment	incidentally
besides	for this reason	indeed
but of course	formerly	initially
by the same token	fortunately	instead
certainly	furthermore	lastly
clearly	generally	like it or not
coincidentally	granted	likewise

mainly	principally	thus(ly)
meanwhile	probably	thus far
more often than not	rather	truly
moreover	really	to an extent
mostly	regardless	to be sure
naturally	regularly	to begin with
nevertheless	remarkably	to put it bluntly/simply
next	sadly	to summarize
no matter what	second(ly)	typically
nonetheless	seriously	undoubtedly
normally	similarly	unexpectedly
noticeably	simply put	unfortunately
notwithstanding	since	until
obviously	so	ultimately
of course	so far	unquestionably
on the contrary	sooner or later	unsurprisingly
on the other hand	still	usually
once	subsequently	what's more
one time	such as	when all's said and done
ordinarily	suddenly	whereas
originally	surely	whether you like it or not
otherwise	surprisingly	while
overall	taken as a whole	whilst
particularly	then	without a doubt
personally	then again	without further ado
plus	thereby	with this/that
possibly	therefore	yet
previously	though	

In conclusion, please remember that *in conclusion* usually isn't a great way to end a paper. We can tell it's almost over once we've reached the last page! However, it might be a solid way of grabbing people's attention when you're giving a speech or other presentation.

**By including transitional phrases in your writing, you can guide your reader and yourself through complex ideas. Besides, they make you sound smart! Therefore, you should keep a list of transitional phrases nearby as you tackle your essays and other nonfiction writing.**

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