

Transitions:
A Step-by-Step Guide to Helping Readers Understand Your Logic

Step 1: Write a strong, specific, and debatable thesis statement. The **key words** from your thesis will help you write transitions throughout your essay.

KEY WORDS ARE YOUR FRIENDS!

Example thesis:

A reformation of media coverage, one that focuses more on local news that is directly relevant to viewers, could help prevent media-driven tragedies.



Step 2: Use the MEAL plan for body paragraph structure: keep your readers focused on your thesis and the points that support it, and weave the key words throughout to make the “old/new” contract in your readers’ brains.

The “old/new” contract helps readers transition logically from one point to the next based on the idea that if a reader reads an idea once, it becomes familiar. Then, the next idea associated with the one previously introduced will make more sense. It’s a cognitive psychology thing.

- M:** Make a claim: Break down your thesis statement into key words and ideas. Address each key idea one-by-one and focus each paragraph on one key idea that supports your thesis.
- E:** Evidence to support the claim: Include a relevant quote or paraphrase from your research and cite it.
- A:** Analyze the evidence: Explain what your evidence means in a way that supports the topic sentence claim. How do you do that? Link specifics from your evidence back to the key ideas in your topic sentence!
- L:** Link to thesis: Don’t stop at explaining the evidence—go a step further and show how your analysis of the evidence supports your overall thesis by (can you guess?) including key ideas from your thesis statement.

Example paragraph that supports the above thesis statement on media reform:

M: Bold

E: Italics

A: Underlined

L: Highlighted

Circle the key words/key ideas that help readers transition from one idea to the next.

The tragedy in Waco was precipitated by undue national media attention. This attention not only created a stage for David Koresh to broadcast his beliefs, but also jeopardized law enforcement's efforts to diffuse the situation. Nationally recognized journalist Jeff Kamen critiques media outlets' approaches to covering the event. Kamen argues that news networks, and especially those who televised the two-month standoff live, hurt law enforcement's efforts to disarm the compound and end the altercation. He believes that because Koresh was receiving so much attention from the media, he decided to prolong the standoff to draw more attention to himself and his cult's beliefs (Kamen 28). In addition, he stated that because newsrooms often do not have editorial rules, there was no way to regulate what the press covered, and often the press gave away important FBI tactical information. This was extremely dangerous, because there was a risk that Koresh had access to television broadcasts and could know beforehand what law enforcement's plans were to end the siege (30-31). David Koresh used the media to his own advantage, garnering huge ratings and setting the stage for future ideologues to do the same. **It is possible that without national media attention, the standoff could have ended peacefully.**

Transitional Words/Phrases and Conjunctions: use them to begin and connect sentences to show relationships between ideas.

****Don't ever assume your readers are making the same logical connections as you—tell them how to think about ideas with explanations and relationship words, like these:**

Common transitions	
TO SHOW ADDITION	and, also, besides, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, next, too, first, second
TO GIVE EXAMPLES	for example, for instance, to illustrate, in fact, specifically
TO COMPARE	also, in the same manner, similarly, likewise
TO CONTRAST	but, however, on the other hand, in contrast, nevertheless, still, even though, on the contrary, yet, although
TO SUMMARIZE OR CONCLUDE	in short, in summary, in conclusion, to sum up, therefore
TO SHOW TIME	after, as, before, next, during, later, finally, meanwhile, then, when, while, immediately
TO SHOW PLACE OR DIRECTION	above, below, beyond, nearby, opposite, close, to the left
TO INDICATE LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP	if, so, therefore, consequently, thus, as a result, for this reason, because, since

An example of using transitions/relationship words to help the reader understand the writer's logic:

Sentence-level transitions Certain words and phrases signal connections between (or within) sentences. Frequently used transitions are included in the chart on page 63.

Skilled writers use transitional expressions with care, making sure, for example, not to use *consequently* when *also* would be more precise. They are also careful to select transitions with an appropriate tone, perhaps preferring *so* to *thus* in an informal piece, *in summary* to *in short* for a scholarly essay.

In the following paragraph, taken from an argument that dinosaurs had the "right-sized" brains for reptiles of their body size," biologist Stephen Jay Gould uses transitions (highlighted) with skill.

I don't wish to deny that the flattened, minuscule head of large bodied Stegosaurus houses little brain from our subjective, top-heavy perspective, **but** I do wish to assert that we should not expect more of the beast. **First of all**, large animals have relatively smaller brains than related, small animals. The correlation of brain size with body size among kindred animals (all reptiles, all mammals, **for example**) is remarkably regular. **As** we move from small to large animals, from mice to elephants or small lizards to Komodo dragons, brain size increases, **but** not so fast as body size. **In other words**, bodies grow faster than brains, **and** large animals have low ratios of brain weight to body weight. **In fact**, brains grow only about two-thirds as fast as bodies. **Since** we have no reason to believe that large animals are consistently stupider than their smaller relatives, we must conclude that large animals require relatively less brain to do as well as smaller animals. **If** we do not recognize this relationship, we are likely to underestimate the mental power of very large animals, dinosaurs **in particular**.

— Stephen Jay Gould, "Were Dinosaurs Dumb?"

From *Rules for Writers*, 8th Ed., 2016, by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers, p. 63 & 61.

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