

INSTITUTE WRITING PROGRAM

THE WRITING CENTER

Organization and Transitions

Evaluating “flow”

When we say a paper “flows,” we generally mean that the reader moves from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph without too much confusion. “Flow” is generally a matter of clear signposting and strong transitions. Use the following steps to identify and strengthen the flow and organization of your paper.

Make a reverse outline

Read each paragraph and in the margin, write a phrase or sentence that describes what the paragraph is about. Remember, the paragraph’s function and the paragraph’s topic are two different things. You could identify a paragraph as “introduction” or “second body paragraph,” but those labels don’t tell you what the paragraph is about. Instead, aim for a short, descriptive phrase, like “reasons to be afraid of spiders,” or “pro-spider propaganda.”

Evaluate topic sentences

Once you have identified the topic of each paragraph, take a look at the first sentence of the paragraph. Would your reader be able to identify the main topic of the paragraph based on the first sentence? If not, consider revising your topic sentence to make the main point of the paragraph clearer to your reader.

Evaluate paragraph order

Now that you have labeled each topic, you have a skeleton map of your paper. Look over the different topics. What order are they in? Do you move chronologically through your subject? Are the first few paragraphs a description of a problem, and the later paragraphs the solution? You should be able to identify a specific reason that the paragraphs are ordered the way they are.

If you can’t identify a reason for the paragraph order, spend some time thinking about how the paragraphs should be ordered. Which points need to be made early in the paper? Which ideas need to be saved for later? Do you return to the same idea in multiple paragraphs? Rearrange the paragraphs so that they are in an order that makes sense to you.

Check transitions between paragraphs

Think about the relationship between your paragraph topics. What does Topic C have to do with Topic D? Is D an example of C? Are C and D opposing ideas? Examine the sentences at the beginning and end of each paragraph. Do the transitions help your reader understand why you have ordered the paragraphs in this particular way? Do they communicate the relationship between the paragraphs that you identified? Consult the chart at the end of this handout for transitions you might use.

Evaluate each paragraph for coherence

Now look at the individual sentences in each paragraph. Does every sentence relate to the topic you identified as the main point of the paragraph? Will your reader be able to tell how each sen-



tence relates to the topic? Can you make the relationship between each sentence and the overall topic clearer for your reader? If you have trouble explaining how a sentence relates to the paragraph topic, consider moving the sentence to a different paragraph.

Check the transitions between the sentences

Do they help your reader understand why you are moving from one sentence to the next? Do they make the relationships between your ideas clear?

Transitions

Transitions help show your reader what the relationship between sentences, paragraphs, and ideas is, and why you are moving from one place to the next. Strong transitions indicate a specific relationship between ideas, so it helps to begin by identifying the kind of relationship you are trying to show. Use the chart below for help choosing transitions.

Time and Sequence	next, later, after, while, meanwhile, immediately, earlier, first, second, before
Comparison	likewise, similarly, also, too, again, in the same manner, equally
Contrast	in contrast, on the other hand, however, although, yet, still, nonetheless
Examples	for example, for instance, such as, specifically, thus, to illustrate
Cause and Effect	as a result, consequently, accordingly, for this reason, thus, because
Place/Order	next to, above, behind, beyond, near, here
Addition	and, too, moreover, in addition, besides, furthermore, next, also
Concession	of course, naturally, it is true that, it may be the case that, though
Conclusion	in conclusion, in short, as a result, finally, therefore
Repetition	to repeat, in other words, once again
Summary	on the whole, to summarize, to sum up, in brief, therefore

Source: University of Texas Undergraduate Writing Center, <http://uwc.utexas.edu/handouts/transitions/>

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