

Transitions

When people read, they expect each new section to link clearly to what they have already read. Transitions are like signposts that signal where the road is turning and limit the possible directions that an unfolding argument might take.



Consider how the use of “therefore” and “nevertheless” limits the range of possibilities in the following examples:

While on vacation, Suzie caught the chicken pox. Therefore, _____.

While on vacation, Suzie caught the chicken pox. Nevertheless, _____.

“Therefore” signals to the reader that what follows is a consequence. Most readers will imagine a sentence similar to this one:

Therefore, she spent her vacation lying in bed itching, feverish, and miserable.

In contrast, “nevertheless” signals an unexpected or denied consequence, so the reader might anticipate a sentence such as this:

Nevertheless, she enjoyed her two weeks off, thanks to a couple of bottles of calamine lotion, some good books, and a big easy chair overlooking the ocean.

Common Transitions and Their Meanings

First, second, third, next, finally, earlier, later, meanwhile, afterward

Sequence—First, we went to dinner; then we went to the movies.

That is, in other words, to put it another way, —(dash), :(colon)

Restatement—He’s so hypocritical that you can’t trust a word he says. To put it another way, he’s a complete phony.

Rather, instead

Replacement—We shouldn’t use the money to buy opera tickets; rather, we should use it for a nice gift.

For example, for instance, a case in point

Example—Mr. Carlyle is very generous. For example, he gave the janitors a special holiday gift.

Finally, lastly, as a result, therefore, to sum up, all in all, in conclusion, because

Conclusion—We went shopping at Macy’s, Target, and Walgreens. Finally, we got to go home with our wares.