

TRANSITIONS

Upon successful completion of this lesson, you should be able to:

- provide missing transitions in an essay so that the text is more coherent and easier to read

Transitions can be words, phrases, sentences, or entire paragraphs that link one idea to the next, and they are incredibly important in any piece of writing. Unfortunately, they are underused. Most writers inherently understand the need for transitions and use them at times, but even good writers fail to use them as often as they should. Transitions are not difficult to understand, but using them requires paying careful attention to one's work.

Writing too quickly—without carefully revising—is the most common reason that writers fail to use transitions when they should. When we put a series of connected thoughts on paper, *we* know the thoughts are connected. Consequently, we often neglect to use transitions. However, our readers do *not* necessarily know when two thoughts or ideas are connected. When we fail to use transitions, we unintentionally ask readers to read not only our text, but also our minds.

Below are the first four paragraphs in the preface to *A Writer's Guide to Transitional Words and Expressions*. (Coincidentally, this handy little book is available in the Sterling College Writing Center.) Refer to the Emphasized Words Key as you read.

Emphasized Words Key

Highlighted words = transitions that connect ideas within sentences

Bold words = transitions that connect sentences

Underlined words = transitions that connect paragraphs

A Writer's Guide to Transitional Words and Expressions is designed as a complementary text for *A Writer's Guide to Using Eight Methods of Transition*. Writers who use both books regularly will learn how to embed a greater variety of transition in their writing and create more effective prose. **In addition**, they will realize that this variety will reduce redundancies, increase liveliness, and provide the kinds of connections in writing that make readers able to follow their ideas—from point to point, from paragraph to paragraph, and from beginning to end.

Almost anything you examine has some interrelationship or connection. Buttons and buttonholes, **for instance**, serve to join the two sides of a shirt; **in another case**, road signs allow you to drive from point A to point B without getting lost; engineers design couplers to link hundreds of freight cars. It would not be difficult for you to think of many

more examples, but let's focus on connections in the world of the writer. **In that way** you will have a better understanding of why this small and practical book has been designed for your use.

As a writer you must realize that sentences and paragraphs need to be connected, too. **When you connect them**, you provide a sense of movement that allows your readers to follow the main and subordinate ideas easily and, **as a result**, understand your purpose and message.

More specifically, to achieve clear and coherent communication, you will have to show distinct relationships between sentences and paragraphs. **In turn**, you will eliminate confusion, disinterest, and frustration among your readers. (Victor C. Pellegrino, *A Writer's Guide to Transitional Words and Expressions*, [Wailuku, Hawaii; Maui Arthoughts Company, 1995], Preface)

Notice how some of the transitions are short phrases (they can even be a single word). One of them, however, is an entire sentence that connects the third paragraph to the one before it. (The key word in that sentence is *too*.) Occasionally, you may even need to write an entire paragraph that serves as a transition. **The type of transitions that students neglect most frequently is the type that connects paragraphs.**

EXERCISE

In the following essay, certain transitions have been omitted. Fill in the blanks by writing appropriate transitional words, phrases, or sentences. Work with your tutor if you wish.

For your benefit, instructional comments have been added and some transitions have been identified. **Answers are located at the end of the document.**

A final note: In many instances, a transition as simple as a single word can be the difference between clarity and confusion. Words such as *first*, *second*, *third*, *next*, *another*, *other*, and *also* signal to your readers that you are moving from one idea to another. While these words may be small in length, their impact on the clarity and flow of your writing is big.

Arguments for Separation Attitude in Organizational Leadership Not Necessarily Sound

by Randy Relationship

All around us is evidence that *leadership* has become an important word in our culture. Summer camps across the country are now geared toward helping children develop leadership skills, and leadership training is even

available to children in elementary schools. In much of the business world, having an M.B.A. or an advanced degree in some type of leadership has almost become a prerequisite for landing a high-paying job. The Christian community has _____ begun to demonstrate concern about leadership. Christian colleges are emphasizing the concept of servant leadership in their general education curriculums, and Bible schools and seminaries spend a great deal of time and energy teaching future pastors and Christian educators how to be good leaders.

Use a clause here to connect the second paragraph to the main idea of the first.

_____ , one wonders why so many individuals are frustrated with people in various leadership positions. Employees in every corner of society detest their bosses, and citizens across the country have nothing but contempt for their elected officials. Certainly, many people are born critics who would complain about even the best leaders. **However**, patient, kind, and fair people _____ express frustration with leadership. With our culture paying so much attention to leadership training, why are so many people still complaining about “bad” leaders?

This is a transitional paragraph. It answers the question from the previous paragraph, but it also defines *separation attitude* so the rest of the essay will make sense.

The answer may very well have to do with something called *separation attitude*. In an organizational context, separation attitude is the idea that those at the “top” should maintain a certain degree of “distance” from subordinates. This line of thinking pervades organizations in every corner of society. Even veteran church pastors sometimes advise younger pastors to “avoid getting too close” to the congregation. Intimacy between the shepherd and the sheep can only cause problems, say some church leaders.

Some organizational leaders have separation attitude simply because they are arrogant. They believe they are somehow “better and above” the lower ranks, untouchable, responsible for maintaining intellectual, emotional, and

financial separation between the top and the bottom. _____

champion separation attitude for more respectable reasons, genuinely believing that it will benefit the organization.

This is a short transitional paragraph. It connects the introduction to the body of the essay, or the three arguments.

However, even well-intentioned separation attitude can usually be linked to flawed logic. To be sure, the three most common reasons that leaders use to support separation attitude are quite debatable.

_____ suggests that intimacy between leaders and subordinates will make management and discipline too difficult. **That is**, when subordinates are disciplined by someone they are close to, they won't take the discipline as seriously as they should. A basic truth about human nature, _____, challenges this assumption. People who have proven their genuine concern for those they are managing will find that their direction and guidance is more welcomed. Most people find that discipline is more meaningful when they know it is coming from someone who has taken the time to build a relationship with them.

Remember: Failing to connect paragraphs is the most common transitional mistake made by student writers. Here a transition is needed to move from one supporting argument to the next.

_____ has to do with time management and a leader's ability to get work done. Some leaders believe their workdays would be filled with conversations and meetings if they did not have separation attitude. _____, they maintain an atmosphere of strict formality between themselves and their subordinates. The formality cultivates a sense of distance, which makes leaders less accessible, which allows them to do their work. So goes the argument.

_____, this argument belittles the majority of the working public. In general, people are sensitive to other people's schedules. **Moreover**, if people felt they could talk about business with their leaders in impersonal settings—during impromptu meetings in the hallway, _____—perhaps subordinates would not need to reserve leaders' calendar slots for

formal meetings.

maintains that some subordinates will take advantage of relationships they have with superiors. **While this may be a legitimate concern**, leaders should take the risk of developing relationships with subordinates. Doing so can benefit leaders as well as organizations. _____, who knows how many good business ideas never made it to fruition because people felt they couldn't approach their leaders with them? Many of the problems that leaders attribute to being too close to subordinates can be eliminated with one simple tactic: taking an interest in *all* of the people they lead or manage, not just selected individuals. When subordinates know they do not have more or less access to their leaders than their peers do, they will be less inclined to take advantage of their leaders.

To be clear, hierarchy is certainly not a bad thing. _____, society would not function without it. But separation attitude need not be a necessary part of hierarchy. Some of the most common reasons that leaders use to support separation attitude are quite debatable, and by disavowing separation attitude, leaders might just find that they make themselves *and* their subordinates much happier.

Answers to the Exercise:
(Answers are shaded.)

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All around us is evidence that *leadership* has become an important word in our culture. Summer camps across the country are now geared toward helping children develop leadership skills, and leadership training is even available to children in elementary schools. In much of the business world, having an M.B.A. or an advanced

degree in some type of leadership has almost become a prerequisite for landing a high-paying job. The Christian community has **also** begun to demonstrate concern about leadership. Christian colleges are emphasizing the concept of servant leadership in their general education curriculums, and Bible schools and seminaries spend a great deal of time and energy teaching future pastors and Christian educators how to be good leaders.

With so much leadership training taking place, one wonders why so many individuals are frustrated with people in various leadership positions. Employees in every corner of society detest their bosses, and citizens across the country have nothing but contempt for their elected officials. Certainly, many people are born critics who would complain about even the best leaders. **However**, patient, kind, and fair people **also** express frustration with leadership. With our culture paying so much attention to leadership training, why are so many people still complaining about “bad” leaders?

The answer may very well have to do with something called *separation attitude*. In an organizational context, separation attitude is the idea that those at the “top” should maintain a certain degree of “distance” from subordinates. This line of thinking pervades organizations in every corner of society. Even veteran church pastors sometimes advise younger pastors to “avoid getting too close” to the congregation. Intimacy between the shepherd and the sheep can only cause problems, say some church leaders.

Some organizational leaders have separation attitude simply because they are arrogant. They believe they are somehow “better and above” the lower ranks, untouchable, responsible for maintaining intellectual, emotional, and financial separation between the top and the bottom. **Other leaders** champion separation attitude for more respectable reasons, genuinely believing that it will benefit the organization.

However, even well-intentioned separation attitude can usually be linked

to flawed logic. To be sure, the three most common reasons that leaders use to support separation attitude are quite debatable.

One common argument in support of separation attitude suggests that intimacy between leaders and subordinates will make management and discipline too difficult. **That is**, when subordinates are disciplined by someone they are close to, they won't take the discipline as seriously as they should. A basic truth about human nature, **however**, challenges this assumption. People who have proven their genuine concern for those they are managing will find that their direction and guidance is more welcomed. Most people find that discipline is more meaningful when they know it is coming from someone who has taken the time to build a relationship with them.

Another argument used to justify separation attitude has to do with time management and a leader's ability to get work done. Some leaders believe their workdays would be filled with conversations and meetings if they did not have separation attitude. **Therefore**, they maintain an atmosphere of strict formality between themselves and their subordinates. The formality cultivates a sense of distance, which makes leaders less accessible, which allows them to do their work. So goes the argument.

However, this argument belittles the majority of the working public. In general, people are sensitive to other people's schedules. **Moreover**, if people felt they could talk about business with their leaders in impersonal settings—during impromptu meetings in the hallway, **for instance**—perhaps subordinates would not need to reserve leaders' calendar slots for formal meetings.

Yet another common argument used in support of separation attitude maintains that some subordinates will take advantage of relationships they have with superiors. **While this may be a legitimate concern**, leaders should take the risk of developing relationships with subordinates. Doing so can benefit leaders as well as organizations. **After all**, who knows how many good business ideas never made it to fruition because people felt they couldn't approach their leaders with them? Many of the problems that

leaders attribute to being too close to subordinates can be eliminated with one simple tactic: taking an interest in *all* of the people they lead or manage, not just selected individuals. When subordinates know they do not have more or less access to their leaders than their peers do, they will be less inclined to take advantage of their leaders.

To be clear, hierarchy is certainly not a bad thing. **In fact**, society would not function without it. But separation attitude need not be a necessary part of hierarchy. Some of the most common reasons that leaders use to support separation attitude are quite debatable, and by disavowing separation attitude, leaders might just find that they make themselves *and* their subordinates much happier.