

Transition and Focusing Words

*Good writers emphasize important ideas.
Good writers make connections between ideas.*

Read the two paragraphs below. How are they different from each other? What do the words in dark type add to paragraph II? Are the relationships between ideas clearer?

- I We didn't notice anything. It began to occur to us that something was the matter. We weren't sure what had happened, we didn't know what to do to fix it. We were afraid of making it worse.
- II We didn't notice anything **at first**. **Then** it began to occur to us that something was the matter. **Since** we weren't sure what had happened, **however**, we didn't know what to do to fix it. **Besides**, we were afraid of making it worse.

No matter what you write—whether you are describing something, explaining something, or making an argument—you want the reader to be able to follow you. You cannot just put down your ideas or observations without some signals that let the reader know what is coming next. Words like **then**, **here**, **so**, **because**, **although**, **for instance**, and **for these reasons** tell the reader the following kinds of things:

- This is what I plan to discuss.
- This is what happened first.
- This is how these two ideas are connected.
- Here is an example.
- This is important.
- Now I have finished.

These words provide **transitions**, or make connections, between sentences and paragraphs. They also help the reader **focus** on particular ideas or pieces of information. Transition and focusing words help the reader see what your main points are and how the pieces of your essay are related.

Practice 1

There are many kinds of transition and focusing words. Some of them are given below. They are grouped to show how they can be used in sentences. Following each group is a practice sentence. Choose a transition or focusing word (or group of words) to complete the sentence and write it in the blank. (Notice that in some cases there are several possible choices.)

continued ...

1. **Words used to add or emphasize ideas, information, or examples:**

for example, for instance, in addition, in other words, furthermore, also, specifically, besides, moreover, further, again, in the first place, equally important, as well, in fact, such as, such . . . , this . . . , that . . . , these . . . , those . . .

Georgia's ideas—_____, her plan for recycling peanut shells—are sometimes difficult to carry out.

2. **Words used to show time order:**

first, second, next, then, now, last, finally, meanwhile, later, earlier, before, after, at the same time, during

_____ we read the report, we will be ready to tell you what we think of it.

3. **Words used to show space order:**

above, below, left, right, inside, outside, on top of, underneath, next to, in front, behind, beyond, near, far, in, on, under

_____ the desk is a neatly lettered sign that says "Genius at work."

4. **Words used to show order of importance:**

first, last, next, then, nearly, in the first place, moreover, furthermore, most important, equally important, less important, so, therefore, consequently

Mendoza's theory, _____, is the most original idea to be published in the last ten years.

5. **Words used to compare or contrast ideas:**

however, though, even though, although, on the other hand, yet, nevertheless, conversely, as opposed to, rather than, in spite of, compared to, similarly, in the same way, as well as, likewise

During the past week, _____, new evidence has come to our attention.

6. **Words used to show cause and effect:**

since, as, because (of), due to, so, therefore, then, consequently, as a result (of), in effect, for this reason, accordingly

_____, Professor Pirenza no longer knows what to believe.

7. **Words used to summarize or conclude:**

briefly, to summarize, to sum up, in short, for these reasons, in conclusion, to conclude, as you can see, in other words, in any case, on the whole, undoubtedly, after all

The result, _____, is confusion and uncertainty for everyone involved in the project.

Practice 2

The following two paragraphs need to have transition and focusing words added to them. Fill each blank with the word or group of words from the list below that makes the most sense.

[1] _____, scientists have known about the loud, trumpeting sounds elephants make to communicate. Now, [2] _____, they have begun to study another form of elephant communication. Elephants have a spot on their forehead that vibrates when they bellow or growl. It vibrates at other times [3] _____. The scientists cannot hear anything, [4] _____ they are convinced that the elephants are producing sounds too low for human ears.

The existence of [5] _____ low-frequency sounds could explain some of the mysteries of elephant communication. [6] _____, it would explain how elephants communicate over long distances, [7] _____ low-frequency sounds travel much farther than high-frequency sounds. This sort of complex communication system might [8] _____ explain how elephants are able to organize their society.

but
nearly
for example
as well

during
however
such
also

consequently
for a long time
since
rather than