



Transition Words

Transition words are often described as the glue that holds sentences and paragraphs together. At the risk of a catastrophic mixing of metaphors we would also like to describe them as the oil that helps ideas to flow naturally from one sentence to another.

Transition words come in all shapes and sizes. There are many of them, so many that they are often categorized as well as listed.

Here are a couple of examples of categories and lists:

<http://larae.net/write/transition.html>

<http://jc-schools.net/write/transition.htm>

You can also Google 'transition words' for lots more, or see Web Resource 8.2 for some of our favourites.

Below you will find three paragraphs taken from undergraduate social science essays. In each case, the first example has had the transition words removed. You will find the removed transition words listed below the paragraph. See whether you can identify where the transition words might go. The paragraph as originally written follows, with the transition words reinstated.

Although we have made minor changes for educational purposes, these paragraphs were written by Open University students Mr Phil Ellis, Mr David Purcell and Ms Teresa Garrard. We are most grateful for their kind permission to reprint these excerpts from their essays here.

The first excerpt is from a Politics essay on the contested concept of freedom. The paragraph comes from the main body of the essay.

- 1 An examination of the right to self-determination shows how these contested issues can influence arguments. A fundamental question is: under what circumstances does a group have the right to secede from a state, exercising a right to self-determination? Most democratic theorists would argue that the majority should decide, but that raises questions of its own, such as: the majority of whom – the people in the area claiming the right to secede, or all the people in the state which will be affected? What majority is required? Would secession bring similar such rights to other communities to exercise too (Saward, 2005)? To take an argument of positive freedom to its extreme conclusion would be to allow *everyone* the freedom to secede and form their own private state, a solution that is unworkable in practice. Robert A. Dahl (cited in Saward, 2005) notes that this extreme form of democracy – the one-person state – ‘would be absurd’. Those who advocate the benefits of negative freedom would wish to protect the freedom of people from interference; they would require that a ‘super-majority’ was necessary to pass any vote in favour of secession.

Transition and link words: however; in addition; thereby; furthermore

The following is the same paragraph with the transition and link words reinstated.

- 2 An examination of the right to self-determination shows how these contested issues can influence arguments. A fundamental question is: under what circumstances does a group have the right to secede from a state, thereby exercising a right to self-determination? Most democratic theorists would argue that the majority should decide, but that raises questions of its own such as: the majority of whom – the people in the area claiming the right to secede, or all the people in the state which will be affected? In addition, what majority is required? Furthermore, would secession bring similar such rights to other communities to exercise too (Saward, 2005)? To take an argument of positive freedom to its extreme conclusion would be to allow everyone the freedom to secede and form their own private state, a solution that is unworkable in practice. Robert A. Dahl (cited in Saward, 2005) notes that this extreme form of democracy – the one-person state – ‘would be absurd’. Those who advocate the benefits of negative freedom, however, would wish to protect the freedom of people from interference; they would require that a ‘supermajority’ was necessary to pass any vote in favour of secession.

Phil Ellis

The second excerpt is also from a Politics essay, this time on the role of elites in democratic electoral systems. The paragraph comes towards the end of the essay, and continues a discussion about problems with voter participation.

- 3 The issue of voter participation, and the government having legitimacy by reflecting the will of the masses, could be tackled with the use of compulsion. In Australia it is a legal requirement for those able to vote to do so. Turnout in Australian elections is usually about 95%. In a representative system elites will always form, at least the people can see that it is they who put them there – and they can also remove them.

Transition words: although, therefore, consequently, for example, next

The example below is the same paragraph, with the transition words reinstated.

- 4 Next, the issue of voter participation, and therefore the government having legitimacy by reflecting the will of the masses, could be tackled with the use of compulsion. In Australia, for example, it is a legal requirement for those able to vote to do so. Consequently turnout in Australian elections is usually about 95%. Although in a representative system elites will always form, at least the people can see that it is they who put them there – and they can also remove them.

David Purcell

Here is one more example. Again, the transition words have been removed from the first paragraph, and reinstated in the second. This is taken from near the beginning of a short Health and Social Care essay, dealing with the strengths and weaknesses of behaviour change models.

- 5 Behaviour change models are popular because they can usually be applied to a variety of behaviours. SCM is used in smoking, weight control, alcohol misuse, HIV risk behaviour and other areas (NHS Scotland, 1997). There are concerns about applying the models so broadly, especially to behaviours which they were not originally intended for. West (2005) is highly critical of the use of SCM in relation to addiction, and my own brief analysis of SCM, HBM and the HAM showed that HBM was far more relevant than the others when applied to cervical screening behaviour. Some of the models work better in certain circumstances than others. I would argue that no behaviour change theory should be expected to be universally applicable, because of the complexities of human behaviour, diversity of populations and range of health conditions and determinants. This means that practitioners need to have the skills to recognise when and how to apply a variety of models.

Transition words: therefore, however, though, for instance, clearly, for example

Here is the same essay with the transition words reinstated:

- 6 Behaviour change models are popular because they can usually be applied to a variety of behaviours. For example, SCM is used in smoking, weight control, alcohol misuse, HIV risk behaviour and other areas (NHS Scotland, 1997). There are concerns about applying the models so broadly, however, especially to behaviours which they were not originally intended for. West (2005), for instance, is highly critical of the use of SCM in relation to addiction, and my own brief analysis of SCM, HBM and the HAM showed that HBM was far more relevant than the others when applied to cervical screening behaviour. Clearly, some of the models work better in certain circumstances than others.

I would argue, therefore, that no behaviour change theory should be expected to be universally applicable, because of the complexities of human behaviour, diversity of populations and range of health conditions and determinants. This means though that practitioners need to have the skills to recognise when and how to apply a variety of models.

Teresa Garrard