

Fish & Wildlife Service – National Conservation Training Center
Critical Writing/Critical Thinking Follow-up Web Series CSP3167OL
Go with the Flow—Adding Transitions
November 19, 2009

Speakers: Michelle Baker (MB)
Kristi Young (KY)

Karene Motivans (KM)
Heidi

JoAnn Mills (JM)

[audio start]

MB: I hope that you've got your downloads for today's session. And we're going to jump right into go with the flow—adding transitions. So, the first question that I have for you is, how would you describe the writing in this very long paragraph here. Take a minute to read through the paragraph on your screen and give me some adjectives that you would use to describe this writing. You can do that through the chat feature by sending your description to me. You can send it to all participants if you'd like everyone to see your comments. Or you can unmute your phone and just provide us with a description.

So, any comments on this piece of writing? Good. I heard choppy. Ooh, I heard stern. I like that interpretation of tone. And doesn't flow. Very good. Confusing. Difficult to read. Good sleep aid. Very good.

I think what you're all seeing is that while this paragraph provides a lot of information, it doesn't do very much to tell us how the information is connected or what we're supposed to do with all of it. And that leads us to our definition of transitions. Transitions are words and phrases that work very much like the operation signs in an equation. They tell us what to do with each idea, how to combine our ideas, and what it all adds up to.

Most of the time, we write naturally without thinking about our transitions, and we include them on a regular basis. I'd like you to practice doing that right now before we look at any examples of transitions to see what you already know and what you're already using as a transition. So this group of sentences, which is the first example on your handout, I'd like you to join all four sentences into one long sentence. Take a couple of minutes, and give it a try. I'm going to give you 90 seconds to work on this example.

Alright. So I got the messages that you folks were done or were struggling. Maybe you came up with something that looks a little bit like this. My best friend has MS, and although most days she seems pretty normal, when I went to see her last weekend, she couldn't get out of bed. All the words that are highlighted there are common transitions that we use on a pretty regular basis. And hopefully you got something similar in your own practice.

What I'd like to do now is start little poll for us, and ask you this question. When should we use transitions in our own writing? You'll have four possibilities. When should we

use transitions in our own writing? Go ahead and answer that. You've got 45 seconds remaining. You should be able to click on an answer and hit submit, as I see that about 4 of you have already done. I'm watching the bar graph here, it looks like election night on CNN. And we're still waiting on responses from two of our participants. And in our final analysis, our answers are evenly split between "whenever possible" and "never write a paragraph without them."

I hope you guys got the joke there. The answer is, you would never write a mathematical equation without your operating signs. And by the same token, I hope that you would never write a paragraph without your transitional expressions. I absolutely cannot overestimate the importance of transitions. They're huge.

So let's talk now about how to do that. There are a number of ways that we can do that, and we're going to start with the basics. And at this point, you want to have out your chart of transitional expressions so that you can follow along and see some examples of this kind of language. Transitional expressions, which we'll talk about more in just a second, are listed on the lefthand side of the chart, under introductory and interjectory words or phrase. Conjunctions can be both coordinating and subordinating, which we'll talk about in just a minute, and also some more in our December session. Relative pronouns, which have a number of different problems associated with them, and adverbs.

Now, I'd like to point out that these are just for starters. And hopefully at the end of today's session, we'll see a few more detailed examples of how to do transitions differently. But let's start the ball rolling with transitional expressions. These are everybody's favorite transitions for the simple reason that they don't change our sentence structure. So they're easy to add, and very rarely do we end up with mistakes in our writing once we've added them. They consist of single words and short phrases, like Indeed or For Example. One thing to remember when you're using these is that you may need to use a comma around these phrases. If you put them in the middle of your sentence, they're considered parenthetical expressions and they need commas around them. If you'd like them to be emphasized, you should place a comma before or after them. And if they could potentially confuse the reader, they need a comma.

So let's give you some practice. Again, you have a handout with these two sentences. Sexual harassment is not just an issue for women. Men can be sexually harassed too. So take a look at this example, and pick a word or phrase that you think would join up these two sentences effectively. And I'd like to hear your responses on this one. If you could unmute your phones and share with us an idea.

JM: Hi, this is JoAnn. I think either likewise or indeed. Either one would work nicely.

MB: Thank you JoAnn. I like that idea. I also like the fact that you selected your choices from two different logical connections. And we're going to talk about the logical implications in a lot of detail here in a couple of minutes. Very good. Any other responses?

Alright then. Well, let's take a look at our next form of transitions, which is conjunctions. The conjunctions we're going to talk about today are coordinating conjunctions. The subordinating conjunctions we will talk about under the heading of adverbs, and we'll talk about those in more detail too in our next webinar in December. These conjunctions, the coordinating conjunctions, fall into seven categories that can easily be remembered by the acronym FANBOYS. For, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so.

Now the trick to using these conjunctions is to remember, if you're joining a list of three or more items, you need to add a comma before the final conjunction. And if you're joining complete sentences, you need to add a comma before the conjunction. Again, let's try an example. The word status refers to relative position within a group. It is often used to indicate only positions of prestige. Take 30 seconds and fill in a coordinating conjunction.

And we will look at your examples together in just a minute, as soon as we try this again with a relative pronoun. There are basically five relative pronouns that we use often. Who, whom, whose, which, and that. These phrases may or may not need commas, depending on whether they are restrictive or non-restrictive. That's a whole 'nother session that can be found in your grammar and mechanics section in your notebook. There are a number of problems with the use of relative pronouns that we're going to talk about in just a minute, but right now, go ahead and give it a try. Same group of sentences. Try joining them with who, whom, whose, that, or which.

And our final kind of transitions, adverbs. Adverbs fall into two categories, subjunctive and conjunctive. Again, we'll talk about that difference in December. Subjunctive include words like although, because and since. Conjunctive include words like however, therefore, and moreover. The punctuation is very different depending on which one you're using. If it's a subjunctive adverb, then you definitely want to use commas, because it falls under the introductory phrase rule. When these words appear at the beginning of the sentence, we have an introductory phrase, and you should use a comma indicating where the main sentence begins. Also, if the restrictive and non-restrictive rule applies, then we need a comma. Conjunctives are a little bit simpler. We always use commas with them. If they appear at the beginning of the sentence, the comma comes after. If they appear in the middle of the sentence, they get commas on both sides. And if they separate complete sentences, they get a semicolon and a comma.

One more time, with our two sentences. Try using a subjunctive or a conjunctive adverb to join these two sentences.

Alright. Hopefully if you look back at your last three examples, you have something that looks a little bit like this. A conjunction like the word "but," a relative pronoun like the word "that," or an adverb like the word "however." What you'll see is that the conjunction and the adverb both indicate contrast. The relative pronoun, on the other

hand, stands out a little bit. And we're going to talk in just a minute about the reason why.

First of all, let's talk about another problem that could potentially arise with the use of relative pronouns. Oh, I'm sorry. No, first let's summarize what we just did. Conjunctions, relative pronouns, and adverbs join ideas in more complicated ways than the transitional expression on the left hand side of your chart, but because they change the structure of your sentence, they can cause some problems. And here's our first example. Can we get some thoughts, either on the chat or on the telephone as to why the word "that" doesn't work in this sentence. We want to hire someone that has had experience programming.

KY: This is Kristi. It seems to me that that is neutral. It doesn't apply to a person. You think you would want to use who or whom.

MB: You nailed it! That is not a person. People are who. And so, in this case, the pronoun is imprecise. To take a look at the group of sentences we just had before, we need a couple of definitions that'll help us out. A pronoun is a word that refers to a noun. The antecedent is the noun that the pronoun refers to. And there are a couple of very simple rules here. Pronouns have to refer back to the most recent noun, and they have to agree with it in number and gender. The problem that we had previously, the word status refers to relative positions within a group that is often used to indicate only positions of prestige. Technically the word that in the sentence refers back to the noun group, but that's not what we intended. We have two ways that we could fix this problem. One, we could rearrange our sentence. Relative position within a group is referred to as a status, which is often used to indicate only positions of prestige. This time our word refers back to status, and that's what it should refer to.

But we also have another option. If we want to keep our sentence in the original order, and there are a number of reasons we may want to do that. Emphasis is one of them. Clarity is another. So we have the option to create what is called a summative modifier. What we do in this instance is to take the previous group of words and sum them up in a noun, in this case the noun idea. The word status refers to a relative position within a group, an idea that is often used to indicate only positions of prestige. That term, summative modifier is probably new to most of us. Very simply, summative modifiers take a big idea, condense it into a few words, and continue with more information about it. Let's take another look at an example. Economic changes have reduced Russian population growth to less than zero, which will have serious social implications. What I'm asking you to do is take the word "which" and replace it with a more precise word or phrase. What are your thoughts? Send them to me using the chat feature.

I heard the answer "a decline". What an excellent response! Economic changes have reduced population growth to less than zero, a decline which will have serious social implications. Fantastic!! Another example that someone much smarter than myself came up with. Economic changes have reduced Russian population growth to less than zero, a demographic event that will have serious social implications.

Summative modifiers are very powerful tools. Before we get some more practice with them, does anybody have questions about anything we covered so far?

KY: Hey Michelle. It's Kristi again. So in that last example, the clause after the comma was modifying the population growth rather than economic changes, correct?

MB: Yes.

KY: Okay, thank you.

MB: Sure. Any other questions? Let's get some practice with this concept. Here's a sentence that I've modified slightly from that original example that we saw. Due to these complications, a special provision allows EPA to address the effects of the action through successive effects determinations, which address groups or categories of similar habitats as established by the EPA. Again, take the word "which", and substitute a noun that summarize the previous idea.

This example is available on your handout, so you can work on your practice on your own writing exercise, and if you'd like to send the answer to me via chat, I'd love to hear what you come up with.

Does anyone have a suggestion that they'd like to give us through chat, or on your telephone?

Alright. The response that I came up with was a series of decisions to describe the successive effects determinations. That's just one possibility out of many. So summative modifiers are a very handy tool if using a relative pronoun would cause an imprecise use of a pronoun. One last problem that we tend to have with the transitions I just mentioned. Sometimes when we use subjunctive adverbs, we can inadvertently write a sentence fragment. We should not consider this a revision of the regulation. Although it does make a big difference. That word, although, at the beginning of our sentence makes what follows dependent, so it needs to be linked to the sentence that came before. The very easy way to fix that is to add a comma right here, and join these two sentences together. Lower case, so that these two become one sentence.

Alright. There are our grammatical problems with transitions. But transitions also pose a problem in the way that they use logic. For example, in the following two sentences, what do you think is the best way to describe the relationship between these two ideas? I'm going to open another poll, and you'll have 60 seconds to choose one out of four answers. We have 20 seconds remaining on the poll for anyone who would still like to weigh in. And very good. Practically everyone selected the example, for example. What I wanted you to see is that there are a number of transitions that would be inappropriate to use here. These two ideas are not contradictory, so the although wouldn't work. There's also not a cause and effect relationship being expressed, so because and furthermore don't work. For example is really the only option left then.

There are a number of other faulty logic problems that we can have. Let's take a look at this one, and again, I'm going to open up a poll for us. What do you think would be the relationship between these two sentences? Because, consequently, furthermore, or although? And answers appear to be evenly split among all of our four choices, which is great. That's exactly what I wanted to see. If we look at the four sentences, and all four sentences, that's what we see.

Any one of these transitions could potentially work with these two sentences. Because the culinary uses are well known, people would have developed medicinal uses. Or potentially vice versa depending on the history of the herb. This could be additional information, as furthermore suggests, but there could also be a contradiction implied. Without the context of the paragraph or the piece of writing, we don't know which one of these transitional expressions is appropriate in these two sentences. I'd also like to point out another logic problems that often follows with transitions. Both the word because and the word consequently express cause and effect relationships, but they do so in reverse order. The first implies that the cause, medicinal uses, and the effect is culinary uses. The second one implies that the cause is culinary uses and the effect is medicinal uses. Let me encourage you to go back to your course notebooks to the cause and effect logical section. Trace out your logical chain with your cause, your effect, and your population, to make sure you're using these transitions in the right way.

Before we move on, do we have any questions or concerns about what we've just covered? Alright then. Last logical problem that we could encounter with transitions, misplaced emphasis. Our two sentences here, we've put the word although in slightly different places. Although the culinary uses of basil are well known, this herb also has medicinal uses. That sentence sounds like we're about to open a discussion on the medicinal uses of basil. If we do that, then this is the sentence that we want to use. If we don't do that, our reader is going to end up confused. Why did we structure the sentence this way? Then the second sentence. The culinary uses of basil are well known, although this herb also has medicinal uses. That makes it very clear that we are not going to talk about the medicinal uses. If we then go on to talk about the medicinal uses, we have again misplaced our emphasis and confused our reader. Once again, this is a topic that we're going to cover in more detail in December's webinar, so be sure and join us for that one.

So to summarize. Transitional expressions we can use all the time with very little concern. If we're using conjunctions, relative pronouns, or adverbs, we need to watch for the following problems. Unclear or incorrect pronoun-antecedent agreement, in which case there are three options. We can specify which noun we're referring to, we can rearrange our sentence, or we can use a summative modifier to clarify. When we're using subjunctive adverbs, we could end up with a sentence fragment. Be sure to keep those linked to previous sentences. And finally, whichever kind of transition we're using, we could end up with some faulty logic. Consider your context. Go back to your logic modules. Do your critical thinking.

So those are the four basic ways to get transitions done—transitional expressions, conjunctions, relative pronouns, and adverbs. Those are our workhorse words. But now, let's talk about different ways to do transitions, some slightly more graceful ways to do transitions. Let's look at two sentences here that clearly have a relationship. The Indian in the character of Tonto was positively portrayed in *The Lone Ranger*, but such a portrayal was more the exception than the norm. Tonto was never accorded the same stature with the man with the white horse and silver bullets.

Clearly there's a relationship between these two sentences, but if we start looking at our chart of transitional expressions, none of the language there seems to summarize that relationship. If we look at the language down the left hand side, there seems to be a contradictory relationship, a despite, or although, but obviously something is missing from these two sentences. That's when transitions become very helpful. By looking for a transition, we discover, we forgot to add an idea. It's right here. Despite this brief glimpse of an Indian as an ever loyal sidekick. We need more than just a word here. We need an explanation. When you have to provide transitions for your reader, you suddenly discover the parts of your text that were missing before.

Let's take a look at a practice. Again, from our example earlier. This provision is needed. Some species and habitats may be affected by the pesticide. You'll need to do some critical thinking here to come up with a connection between those two ideas. But why don't you take a minute to write a sentence that you feel connects the two of them.

KY: Hey Michelle. Maybe I didn't do this right, but I actually reordered everything.

MB: Okay. What did you come up with?

KY: So some species and habitats may be affected by the pesticide; therefore this provision is needed because it will restrict application of the pesticides.

MB: Okay. You did more than just reorder it, and that's great. What you did was to add the causal chain but you also added an explanation for the causal chain, and I think that was really what these two sentences needed. Any other responses that someone would like to share?

Heidi: This is Heidi. I actually, I put in, this provision is needed; therefore a management practice could provide protection for some species and habitats that could be affected by the pesticides.

MB: I think that's great Heidi. What I really like is that we get to see Kristi's answer is very different than Heidi's answer, and that's the point. There's something missing between these two sentences, and by asking ourselves about the transition question, we're forced to explain our critical thinking and make our writing clear.

Alright. So there's one way that transitions can be more effective than simply adding language. Let's look another example, resumptive modifiers. We just talked about summative modifiers, and I know this is a lot of new information to throw at you in one day, but resumptive modifiers allow us to extend the line of our sentence so that we have both more information, but also in a more graceful way. Here's an example. This sentence is fairly short, and it doesn't do much to explain our definitions of true and lyrical, but if we pick up on those ideas, true to the rhythms of the working man's speech, and lyrical in its celebration of his labor, we suddenly extended our sentence and provided more information about our two ideas.

Resumptive modifiers take two or more key ideas at the end of our sentence and add more information about them. In this example, your ideas are toxic chemicals and natural sources. So, take just a minute to write out some more information about the ways that they can both impact our water supply. And again, let me ask for volunteers. Is there anyone who'd like to share with us how toxic chemicals and natural sources can affect our water supply?

KY: This is Kristi again. See how I scribbled this, so I can read my own handwriting. So, second sentence would be toxic chemicals can result in dead zones and watered bodies, while natural sources can contribute high levels of minerals.

MB: Very good. Very good. And Kristi, the only change that I would make to that is instead of making that a new sentence, I would link it to this sentence. So after the word sources, I would place a comma, and then I would say, toxic chemicals that result, and can you continue with what you wrote?

KY: Would it be, toxic chemicals that create dead zones...

MB: And natural sources that...

KY: Okay.

MB: do you see how that works?

Audience: Michelle, would you repeat that?

MB: Sure. What the resumptive modifier does, instead of creating a new sentence with the words toxic chemicals and natural sources, you link them to this sentence. So in Kristi's example, she would say, the Service has long been aware of contamination in the water supply from both toxic chemicals and natural sources, toxic chemicals that create dead zones in the water, and natural sources that And I forgot what Kristi said following that. But do you see how that works?

Audience: Yes.

MB: Very good. Resumptive modifiers are a very sophisticated tool, but if you practice with them, I think you'll find that your ideas are developed in more detail, and you're creating links to ideas that your reader finds very easy to follow.

Alright then. Two final ways that we can create transitions effectively. First, we can repeat ourselves. Now normally repetition is just that, repetition. But in this case, the repetition in these sentences is actually creating a nice unity between the sentences. Never is the most powerful word in the English language, or perhaps any language. It's magic. Every time I have made an emphatic pronouncement invoking the word never, whatever follows that I don't want to happen, happens. Never has made a fool of me many times. Now, the way that this works is that the word never starts the paragraph, reappears in the middle, and starts the last sentence. The repetition of that word at different places in the sentences is what makes it unified throughout. Repetition of a key word is a useful tool also from paragraph to paragraph. When we begin a new paragraph, if we repeat a key word from our previous paragraph, readers are more likely to see the connection between our ideas. And the last way we can create transitions in a more subtle way is by the repetition of sentence structure. It was not only the disappointment my mother felt in me. In the years that followed, I failed her so many times, each time asserting my own will, my right to fall short of expectations. I didn't get straight A's. I didn't become class president. I didn't get into Stanford. I dropped out of college. From Amy Tan's essay *On Mother Tongue*. Look at the way the last three sentences all start with I didn't. They're very short, with a punch. But she only uses that three times, that magical number that we so often incorporate into our writing. In the last sentence of the paragraph, she changes the sentence structure, which ironically emphasizes even more the three sentences that came before it so that they have almost like an exclamation point after them. Very effective technique.

So, in addition to our transitional words and expressions, conjunctions, adverbs, and relative pronouns, we can also develop the logical implications of our ideas, create resumptive modifiers, and repeat key words and sentence structures in order to create transitions, put those operating signs into our equation, and tell our reader how to interpret what we've written. In our final exercise of the day, I'd like you to take another look at that paragraph that we started today's session with. I'd like to give you this opportunity to revise this paragraph using all the techniques that we discussed today. If you would like to do so, you're welcome to email your responses to me, at lbaker@shepherd.edu. I'll take a look at the answers you've given me, I'll provide you with some individual feedback, and if you're interested, then in two weeks from now, I'll collect the responses anonymously and place them on the sharepoint site, so you can see what your peers came up with and how we responded to it.

That's about it for today. If you've got any questions, we've got a couple of minutes left. So please, speak up. Give us a chat. Is there anything we've covered today that wasn't clear, or we went through it too fast, or you tried it and it didn't work the way you thought it would.

KM: Well, Michelle, I want to thank you again for a very good webcast. Perhaps some chat can start up on the sharepoint site on this some more. And I want to remind you all, thank you for joining us, by the way. And remind you all that the next webinar, a continuation of this transitional expressions is scheduled for December 17th.

[audio end]