# 7

# Connections Between Paragraphs

In Chapter 6 you took a close look at the paragraph to see how it was made, examining it apart from the whole essay just as you might examine a carburetor apart from an engine or a single musical phrase apart from a whole composition. You found that the paragraph has a certain wholeness or independence of its own; it could stand alone and still make sense.

You must remember, however, that no matter how well a paragraph stands alone it is always just one small part of a larger whole-the essay itself. And in order to do its part in the whole operation, it must connect smoothly with the parts around it. Like a loaded car on a moving freight train, it carries its own separate portion of cargo, but it must be firmly coupled to the car immediately ahead.

As a matter of fact, it might not be a bad idea to think of ur essay as a moving train. Your introduction is the loco

motive; it commands a clear view of the track, gives a warning toot to announce its departure, and supplies the power to set all the wheels in motion. The body of your essay is the string of paragraphs behind that locomotive, each one a freight car with its particular load of thought. And your conclusion, of course, is the caboose-the little car on the end commanding a view of the country just passed through.

One thing this analogy should make clear is that all those separate cars, if they are to reach their destination, must be firmly hitched together. (If they weren't, you might wind up with a locomotive in Chicago, a string of freight cars scattered over the landscape all the way from Bangor to Tallahassee, and a caboose left sitting high and dry on a siding.) In exactly the same way, your essay can fall apart disastrously unless your paragraphs are firmly linked together.

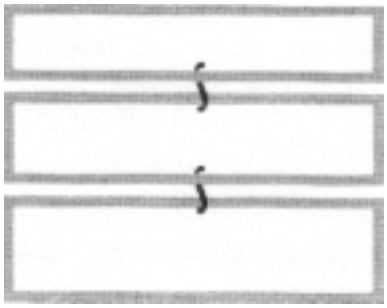

**Figure 8-Connections between Paragraphs**

A single example should make this abundantly clear. Below are two "unhitched" paragraphs from a typical student essay:

> Girls spend far too much time in front of a mirror. They seem to spend at least half their waking hours examining their pores or brushing their eyelashes or adjusting a curl over their right ear to an exact 45-degree angle. They primp constantly.
>
> Girls tend to be good students. They do their assignments faithfully and neatly, organize their work well, and maintain consistently high grades.

The two paragraphs seem to have no relation at all to each other. Bewildered, the reader looks for a connection. Could these two paragraphs possibly have come one after the other in the same essay? The answer is yes-provided they were properly linked:

> *Primp as they may, however, girls* tend to be *good* students....

Begin the second paragraph like that, and the reader follows the train of thought without the slightest difficulty. *Primp as they may, however,* cues him in. Girls have their faults, and nobody can resist needling them a little, but (and here the reader is comfortably at home again with the real thesis) girls manage to be good students, in spite of their faults.

These links between paragraphs are called *transitions,* or *transitional devices.* They have one purpose: to help the reader follow a main line of thought. As the writer, you know exactly what you have in mind each time you make a shift in meaning. But you can't expect your reader to know: he can't read your mind or hear the tone of your voice or see the expression on your face. He can only catch the signals you send him through words.

He needs, in short, a clear transition-a word or phrase that will link the paragraphs together for him.

> *Transitions between paragraphs fall roughly into three categories:*
>
> *1. Standard devices*
> *2. Paragraph hooks*
> *3. Combinations of # 1 and #2*

The standard devices are simple and obvious; they are specific words and phrases, and using them is hardly more than a matter of selection. The paragraph hooks are more sophisticated-and more fun. And when you have mastered the technique of the hook, the combinations will come easily and naturally. No one of the three is "better" than the others; they are all useful and necessary.

The wise writer will make use of all of them.

**Standard Devices**

Perhaps you have already noticed that certain words and phrases recur often in your writing as you develop a thesis. If you want to acknowledge a point that isn't debatable, you may write "It is true that . . ." or "Admittedly," or "Obviously," or any one of several similar expressions. These are the *con* transitions, notifying the reader that you intend to concede a point. A few sentences later you will come back with' a "Nevertheless," or "But . . ." that clearly signals your intention to present arguments in your favor.

Such words and phrases are among the standard transitional devices for leading your reader through an argument. They notify him briefly and efficiently that conflicting points of view are being presented; without them, as you saw in the example on page 94, the conflicting statements seem quite irrational. Here are a few more examples to illustrate the difficulties you can run into:

Girls are a nuisance.
They are wonderful.
The project had value.
It wasted time.
He was a brilliant actor.
He often performed miserably.

These paired statements simply don't make sense. Yet the same statements become perfectly clear when they are supplied with transitions:

*True,* girls are a nuisance.
*Nevertheless,* they are wonderful. *Admittedly,* the project had value. *But* it wasted time.
He was, *to be sure,* a brilliant actor. *Yet* he often performed miserably.

These examples are, of course, oversimplified in order to emphasize the necessity for proper transition; but if each sentence were a fully developed paragraph, the problem of transition would be the same.

You will be tempted to believe that because a connection

between ideas is perfectly clear to you as a writer it is also perfectly clear to the reader. It isn't. The reader needs to be reminded constantly of exactly where you stand. So never omit the transition between paragraphs as you move back and forth between *pro* and *con* arguments.

For additional and more detailed examples of *pro* and *con* transitions, look back at the sample essay structures in Figures 4 and 5, on pages 58-59.

Not all the mechanical transitions, of course, can be classified as strictly *pro* or *con*. What you use, and how you use it, will depend upon the purpose of the paragraph it introduces. You will use one kind of transition when you are shifting your point of view:

> Girls are *a nuisance.*
> *Nevertheless,* they are wonderful.

and another kind when you are simply adding another paragraph in the same vein:

> Girls are a nuisance.
> *Furthermore,* they are gossips.

Other transitional phrases are primarily for emphasis, whether *pro* or *con:*

> Girls are, *in fact,* a menace to society.
> Girls are, *in fact,* the most marvelous creatures in the world.

The best guide to transitions is common sense-and a list like the following. It should give you a word or phrase that will introduce almost any paragraph of argument:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Admittedly | In addition | On the other hand |
| And | In fact | still |
| Assuredly | Indeed | The fact remains |
| But | It is true that | Therefore |
| Certainly | Moreover | Thus |
| Clearly, then | Nevertheless | To be sure |
| Consequently | No doubt | True |
| Even so | Nobody denies | Undoubtedly |
| Furthermore | Obviously | Unquestionably |
| Granted | Of course | Yet |

This is a fairly comprehensive list of standard transitional devices. It is not, however, a complete list. One very important transitional word has been left out-the word "however."

*However* is such a splendid transition, so useful, so convenient, so downright indispensable-and so often misused-that it needs special treatment.

### A NOTE ON "HOWEVER"

The problem with *however* has nothing to do with its meaning. As a transitional device it means exactly the same thing as *but.* But *however* doesn't always sound right. The problem arises from its position in the sentence.

A student writer will almost invariably give *however* first position in a sentence: *"However,* good study habits can't be established overnight." Told not to use first position, he will make a flying leap and deposit it at the end of the sentence: "Good study habits can't be established overnight, *however."*

Nothing is wrong with either of these positions grammatically. But something is wrong with them rhythmically. The best position for *however* is nearly always inside a sentence, between commas:

> Good study habits, *however,* can't be established overnight.

In a compound sentence, it will usually appear inside the first clause:

> Good study habits, *however,* can't be established overnight, and the sooner students learn this the better.

In a complex sentence, it can come either inside the main clause or after the dependent clause, according to the emphasis you prefer:

> Good study habits, *however,* can't be established overnight, as many students learn to their sorrow.
>
> or
>
> As many students learn to their sorrow, *however,* good study habits can't be established overnight.

In any case, *however* works best if it is inside the sentence. Just exactly why this position is best is one of those stylistic mysteries that can't really be explained. It simply sounds better that way. And the importance of sound can't be dismissed, even in silent reading. A reader's inner ear is always cocked and listening, registering every rhythm and cadence of printed language whether that language is spoken aloud or not. And that inner ear likes to have *however* tucked discreetly inside a sentence, usually at one of the following points:

After the subject:

Electricity, *however,* changed the lives of farmers.

Driving on the beach, *however,* can be a risky business.

After the predicate:

They believed, *however,* that right was on their side.

The bus broke down, *however,* before it reached the school.

After an introductory phrase:

In many small ways, *however,* the situation had improved.

After dinner, *however,* they had time to talk.

Note that in all these sentences *however* is protected on each side by a comma. This is the *only* correct punctuation for a tucked-in *however*. Remember that, and you won't make the mistake of trying to use *however* between two independent clauses-a common mistake in student writing: "He was a handsome boy, *however,* he was not very interesting." That doesn't really make sense, as you can see the moment you put in the two commas. So you move your *however* and say what you really mean-thus discovering that you need two separate sentences : "He was a handsome boy. He was not, *however,* very interesting."

Occasionally you will find yourself with *a however* that simply refuses to be tucked into a sentence comfortably. In that case, change it to *but* and put it in first position:

She wanted to apologize, to explain, to let him know that she was sorry. *But* she was afraid of him.

Try reading these two sentences aloud, using *however* instead of *but. You will* discover that no matter where you put the *however* it will have a flat and stilted sound. In some mysterious way the word *but* (which will work only in first position) immediately gives the sentence a more humane and natural tone.

Nobody can prescribe precisely when to put *but* at the head of a sentence or when to use, instead, a tucked-in *however.* This is something you must decide on the basis of your own preference. Try them both for size; test them against your inner ear for tone. But don't use one of them exclusively. For the sake of variety, use first one, then the other.

**Paragraph Hooks**

Although *however* and the other transitional devices listed on page 97 are indispensable to the writer, enabling him to make dozens of connections neatly and efficiently, they can't handle the whole transitional load. Even if they could, no writer would depend upon them exclusively, for they can become painfully obvious when they are used over and over again. You want your reader to be pleasantly aware that your paragraphs are firmly linked, but you don't want him to see the chains too clearly or hear them clank too audibly into place.

So you need another kind of transition, something that is both stronger and subtler. You have it in the *paragraph hook.*

You probably use the paragraph hook often in your own writing without knowing it and see it constantly in your reading without realizing it (as in this sentence, for example). But to take full advantage of its possibilities, you should learn to use the paragraph hook consciously, to direct and control it for your own purposes. Control, remember, is the essence of style, and the handling of transitions is an important part of any writer's style.

To see how the paragraph hook differs from the standard transitional device, look first at the example below. Here the

transition from one paragraph to the next is accomplished by a standard transition alone-the word *but:*

> Mark Twain is established in the minds of most Ameri cans as a kindly humorist, a gentle and delightful "funny man." No doubt his photographs have helped promote this image. Everybody is familiar with the Twain face. He looks like every child's ideal grandfather, a dear old white-thatched gentleman who embodies the very spirit of loving-kindness.

(Standard transition)

> *But* Twain wrote some of the most savage satire ever produced in America....

The standard transition indicates clearly enough that the writer is preparing to take off with a new idea in opposition to the one in the first paragraph. But the transition is far too abrupt. The leap from one idea (how Twain looked) to the next (how he wrote) is simply too great to be handled by a mechanical transition. Observe how much more firmly the paragraphs hang together if the transition is made like this:

> a dear old white-
>
> thatched
>
> gentleman who embodies the very spirit of loving-kindness.

(Paragraph hook)

> The *loving-kindness* begins to look a little doubtful in view of some of his writing. For Twain wrote some of the most savage satire ...

Here you see demonstrated the simplest kind of paragraph hook. The last word of the first paragraph is hooked into the first sentence of the second paragraph and used as a point of departure for introducing another idea. This repetition hooks the paragraphs together solidly. The hook need not be one word; it can be a phrase. It should not, however, exceed two or three words.

Although the last word or phrase of a paragraph frequently serves as the simplest and strongest kind of hook, you can go back farther than this, sometimes to even better effect:

> a dear old white-
>
> thatched
>
> gentleman who embodies the very spirit of loving-kindness.

(Deeper hook)

This *dear old white-thatched gentleman* happens to be the author of some of the most savage satire ...

Generally speaking, the last sentence of a paragraph is the best place to find the hook for your new paragraph, for this sentence is the one freshest in the reader's mind. If you go back much deeper than this, you will usually need a multiple hook, as in this example:

No doubt his photographs have helped promote this image.... He looks like ... the very spirit of loving-kindness.

(Still deeper: the multiple hook)

To accept such an *image is* to betray greater familiarity with the *photographs* than with the writing. For Twain wrote some of the most savage satire ...

Here both *image* and *photographs* are repeated, thus "double hooking" the paragraphs to make up for the greater distance between their first and second appearance. The greater the distance, the more likely you are to need a multiple hook. But no arbitrary rule in this matter is possible. Let your inner ear and your good sense guide you. The important thing is to remember the reader. Make certain that the connection is clear to him. But don't insult him by making the connection *too* clear-that is, by repeating huge sections or whole sentences from the preceding paragraph. One or two key words will do the job.

All the examples so far have been simple word or phrase hooks. Another variation of the paragraph hook is the *idea hook.* The principle is the same; you hook into the preceding paragraph, but instead of repeating an exact word or phrase you refer to the idea just expressed, compressing it into a single phrase:

Mark Twain is .....
..... the very spirit of loving-kindness.

(Idea hook)

*Such a view* of Twain would probably have been a

*t*

source ofhigh amusement to the author himself. For Twain wrote some of the most savage satire ...

or

Any resemblance between *this popular portrait* and the man who reveals himself in his writing is purely imaginary. For Twain wrote ...

In neither of the above examples is an exact word or phrase from the first paragraph repeated. But the hook is clearly there; the referential *such a view* and *this popular portrait* fasten the paragraphs firmly together.

The idea hook can be a great deal more subtle than this, of course. If you examine the work of any accomplished essayist you will find many paragraphs that have no specific word or phrase serving as a link but that are nevertheless unmistakably tied together by meaning. Transitions of this kind require some of the subtlest skills of writing-the ordering of ideas, the use of inference and allusion, the creation of "echo effects," the unobtrusive handling of time and emphasis. All these are skills that derive from an intimate understanding of language-and from experience.

That takes time. Meanwhile the simple idea hook illustrated above can serve you well. By using it you can avoid the danger of overloading your work with either the word hooks or the purely mechanical transitions. Any transitional method, remember, can become annoyingly obvious to a reader if it is overused. So vary your practice, never permitting one method of handling transitions to take over the job exclusively.

**The Combinations**

The combination of standard transitions and paragraph hooks is so natural that you will probably find yourself using it as a matter of course. Any of the samples provided on pages 101 and 102, for example, could be used to demonstrate combinations:

The *loving-kindness* begins to look a little doubtful, *however,* in view of ...

*Yet this dear old white-thatched gentleman ...*
*But* to accept *such* an *image ...*
*Such a view of* Twain, *however, would* probably ...

Whether or not to use a single transition or a combination depends partly upon your sense of what the reader requires for clarity and partly upon your own view of your material and your natural rhythm in writing. If you are certain that you have made yourself perfectly clear with a single transition, let it stand. If you are not certain, or if the rhythm of the sentence seems to need an extra beat, use the combination.

**Summary**

Remember that the chief purpose of transitions is to help your reader follow your train of thought. They are the links that hold your ideas together and keep them moving toward a single goal. So make certain, always, that some kind of link exists between your paragraphs, and that the link exists not only in your own mind but also, clearly and unmistakably, in the words you put on paper.

One kind of link is not necessarily better than any other kind, but variety is better than sameness. So try for variety. Use the purely mechanical devices for quick and simple transitions. Use word and phrase hooks for stronger and clearer links. Use idea hooks for broad references. Use combinations for emphasis and tone.

Use them all. But above all, use them.

QUESTIONS

1. If a paragraph can stand alone as a structure, why should it need to be linked to any other paragraph?
2. Explain the analogy between an essay and a moving train.
3. What are the three kinds of transitions that link paragraphs?

4. Describe a standard transitional device. Give examples. 5. When *however* is used as a transition, what is the best position for it in the sentence?
6. What is the correct punctuation for a tucked-in *however?*
7. This sentence appears on page 100: "You probably use the paragraph hook often in your own writing without knowing it and see it constantly in your reading without realizing it (as in this sentence, for example)." What is the paragraph hook in this sentence? You will have to look back to the paragraph preceding the sentence for your answer.
8. Describe the difference between a simple paragraph hook and a deeper hook.
9. What is a multiple hook?
10. How does an idea hook differ from the other kinds of paragraph hooks?
11. What is a combination transition?
12. Is one kind of transition better than any other kind? If so, why? If not, what is the best guide for deciding which kind of transition to use after you have made certain that you are being clear?

ASSIGNMENT

1. Assume that each of the paired sentences below is the first sentence of two consecutive paragraphs. Supply a transition for the second sentence of each pair:
   a. He received the highest praise for his efforts to improve living conditions in the slums. He was frequently criticized.
   b. The study of science can be a tremendously exciting intellectual experience.
      The study of science can have a narrowing effect.
   c. She caused trouble wherever she went.
      She was the kind of woman who could turn a peaceful exchange of views on the weather into a war of nerves.
   d. Students are showing greater interest in baseball as a school sport.
      Students are showing a greater interest in dramatics.

e. The furniture he had acquired for his living room was surely as ugly as anything ever made by man.
It was comfortable.

f. Far too much emphasis has been placed on psychology and too little on personal responsibility. A knowledge of psychology can be very valuable.

g. The movie was the victim of poor photography and a bad script.
It was interesting.

2. Insert the word *however* in the second sentence of each pair below:

a. He had taken piano lessons for ten years. He was not a good pianist.

b. She planned to finish the assignment on Monday. By Monday she had forgotten all about it.

c. She had very few interests that could be called hobbies. She liked to take long walks in the city, and these led her eventually to make the city itself her hobby.

d. The council has adopted a "wait and see" attitude. This is no solution.

3. Write a picture-frame paragraph in which you describe some aspect of your trip to school each morning-perhaps a single city block where you walk, the bus ride through a particular section of town or country, or the attitude of other students you encounter. Then do the following:

a. Write the first sentence of the next paragraph, using a paragraph hook. (You may also include a standard device if you like.)

b. Write another first sentence for your second paragraph, using a deeper hook.

c. Write another first sentence, using a multiple hook.

d. Write another first sentence, using an idea hook.

e. Write a full paragraph, using one of the sentences above as your opening sentence. This will give you two full paragraphs.

f. Write the opening sentence of a third paragraph to follow the two you have just written, using a combination hook for the transition.

VOCABULARY

1. Write a definition for each of the following words:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| analogy | discreetly | recur |
| appropriate* | indispensable | referential |
| arbitrary | irrational | sophisticated |
| | multiple | |

2. In the left-hand column below are different forms of the words in the vocabulary list. Write a complete sentence in which you use each of these words and also *all* the words and/or phrases that appear opposite it in the right-hand column. This will require a little inventiveness on your part. Your sentence may be as long as you like, and you can fit the combinations into your sentence in any way you please, but hold yourself to one sentence in each case.

- analogous
  appropriately
- arbitrarily
- discreet
- discretion
  dispense
- irrationally
- multiplying
  recurrent
  reference
- referring
  sophistication

links between paragraphs
class, subdued time, limited information, questions

*This word has two different meanings and two different pronunciations. Consult your dictionary.

allowed, choice formality, point convinced, plotting to troubles, blamed, carelessness dream, pursued, who wanted to understand, background notes, the impression that dress, contrast, naturalness