

## MINI-LESSON



# TRANSITIONS

In your story, you are taking readers on a journey. To make that journey enjoyable, you need to make sure your reader is never confused or lost while they read.

One of the best ways to guide your reader through your writing is to use effective **transitions**, words and phrases that show the relationships between ideas. Transitions act as little signposts to help the reader along.

Transitions can be single words, like *first*, *next*, and *finally*, or they can be longer phrases, like *when the play ended* or *before I opened the door*.

This passage from “Frog” has all of the transition words and phrases highlighted.

The first thing I did when their car disappeared around the corner was put music on. I turned it up loud—they were always telling me to turn it down—and danced around the kitchen. Then I went straight for the fridge, where I grabbed a gallon of ice cream, a bottle of chocolate syrup, and a can of whipped cream. I got a spoon, crawled on top of the kitchen island, and ate the ice cream straight out of the carton, globbing on whipped cream and chocolate syrup whenever I wanted.

The next hour was more of the same: dancing, singing, eating, food on the nice couch, standing on tables, watching whatever I felt like on TV. It was heaven. And it would have gone on like that all night if I hadn't spilled soda on my jeans.

I ran back to my room to change real quick, ready to continue with my party, but when I came out, I realized I wasn't alone.

Some of the highlighted parts are pretty long, and they contain words that aren't transition words, but as a group, they behave like transitions, connecting different parts of the story. Sometimes people talk about a story “flowing” well: Those stories probably have a lot of good transitions in them. Take a look at this passage without the transitions:

I put music on. I turned it up loud—they were always telling me to turn it down. I danced around the kitchen. I went straight for the fridge. I grabbed a gallon of ice cream, a bottle of chocolate syrup, and a can of whipped cream. I got a spoon. I crawled on top of the kitchen island. I ate the ice cream straight out of the carton, globbing on whipped cream and chocolate syrup whenever I wanted.

I did more of the same: dancing, singing, eating, food on the nice couch, standing on tables, watching whatever I felt like on TV. It was heaven. I spilled soda on my jeans.

I ran back to my room to change real quick, ready to continue with my party. I realized I wasn't alone.

In this version, the same events are happening, but the story is much choppiier, and we don't see how the events are connected to each other.

## Using Space to Create Transitions

Another way you can create transitions in narrative writing is to use space. In two places in the story “Frog,” you’ll see extra space between paragraphs. This is one way to show that a chunk of time has passed. Usually this is done because nothing really interesting happens in that span of time, so the author just makes a jump.

Try not to do this too often, though: If your story is full of big spaces, it will be hard for your reader to really dig into it.

Dad leaned back in his chair. “I could just stay home,” he offered. Then he looked over at me, eyebrows raised. “What do you say, Bree? Arthur marathon?”

Ugh. Arthur? The last time I watched that show was six years ago! I must have made some kind of face, because right away, Mom warned me to watch my attitude. I rolled my eyes. I couldn’t help it. “Why can’t you just leave me?”

Again, they looked at each other, then back at me. My mom sighed.

“Seriously, though,” I said, sitting up. “I don’t know what you guys think is gonna happen. Do you think I’m going to open the door to some serial killer or burn the house down or something? I get good grades in school and I’ve never gotten in trouble, but apparently I can’t be trusted to walk around the inside of my house for a few hours without causing some major catastrophe!”

Mom crossed her arms and twisted her mouth, thinking. Dad gave her another look. This one was more like a wince, like he was saying She has a point.

The first thing I did when their car disappeared around the corner was put music on. I turned it up loud—they were always telling me to turn it down—and danced around the kitchen. Then I went straight for the fridge, where I grabbed a gallon of ice cream, a bottle of chocolate syrup, and a can of whipped cream. I got a spoon, crawled on top of the kitchen island, and ate the ice cream straight out of the carton, globbing on whipped cream and chocolate syrup whenever I wanted.

The next hour was more of the same: dancing, singing, eating, food on the nice couch, standing on tables, watching whatever I felt like on TV. I texted my friends, took a million selfies, even wore some of my mom’s clothes. It was heaven. And it would have gone on like that all night if I hadn’t spilled soda on my jeans.

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## What to Do Now

Read through your story and look for places that could be clearer if you added transition words and phrases. Use the list on the following page to give you ideas of transitions you might use.

# TRANSITIONAL WORDS AND PHRASES

## To Add

again  
also  
and  
another  
finally  
first  
for one  
furthermore  
in addition  
lastly  
moreover  
next  
second  
secondly  
third  
too  
what's more

## To Illustrate

as an illustration  
for example  
for instance  
take the case of  
to demonstrate  
to illustrate

## To Clarify

in other words  
that is to say  
to put it another way

## To Show Time

after  
as soon as  
at first  
before  
during  
earlier  
finally  
first (second, third...)  
following  
immediately  
later  
little by little  
meanwhile  
next  
now  
soon  
suddenly  
then  
when  
while

## To Show Cause

as a result  
consequently  
due to  
for that reason  
if (or if...then)  
on account of  
therefore  
thus

## To Show Exception

despite  
however  
in spite of  
nevertheless  
of course  
still

## To Compare or Contrast

although  
by comparison  
compared to  
conversely  
however  
in contrast  
in the same way  
likewise  
nevertheless  
on the contrary  
on the other hand  
similarly  
whereas

## To Change the Subject

by the way  
anyway