

FROM THE LEGAL WRITING CLINIC
WRITING TIP OF THE WEEK

USING GENERIC TRANSITIONS



Generic transitions are connecting words or phrases that introduce a sentence to help the reader understand how the new information relates to the previous information. Common generic transitions include expressions such as “however,” “therefore,” and “in addition.” Good writers use these transitions not just because they “sound good,” but because they help show the logical connections between the ideas in different sentences or paragraphs.

Using the correct transition is just as important as knowing when to use a transition. For example, the transition “in addition” adds a new point, whereas the transition “likewise” shows similarity. **Some of the most common types of generic transitions show addition; comparison or contrast; illustration; or conclusion.** Even within these categories, different words can have slightly different meanings, so be sure to use the precise transition you need.

- Sutter’s eyes were bloodshot, and the officer smelled alcohol on his breath. However, Sutter was able to walk a straight line. (transition contrasts ideas in the two sentences)
- The Andersons engaged in many activities at the cabin. For example, each year they held a family reunion there. (transition indicates illustration of idea will follow)
- The suspect was with his daughter at an amusement park until 11:00 p.m. that night. Therefore, he could not have committed the robbery. (transition shows conclusion will follow)

For more information, see Robin Wellford Slocum, Legal Reasoning, Writing, and Persuasive Argument 236-38 (2d ed. 2006); Anne Enquist & Laurel Currie Oates, Just Writing 53-60 (3d ed. 2009); and Laurel Currie Oates & Anne Enquist, The Legal Writing Handbook 497-511 (5th ed. 2010).