Transitions Maintain a Flow in Writing

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The Effective Transition Reminds the Reader Where He/She has been While Directing the Reader Toward Your Next Point.

By Timothy D. Blevins

Law students are often reminded of the need for transitions in their writings. One of the most effective techniques for creating the transition between sentences in the same paragraph is the repetition of words from the former sentence. The repetition technique models the often spoken “take one step backwards to move forward two steps.” Below is an example of words carried forward from one sentence into the next sentence.

The court has stated that a movant seeking access to such information must establish the existence of certain basic characteristics. First among the required characteristics is that the movant establish standing. Other characteristics include ripeness and jurisdiction. It is not enough that the movant simply file the discovery request seeking access.

Notice the repetition of key words such as movant, characteristics, and seeking access. The effective application of transitions, whether between sentences or paragraphs, frees the reader to remain focused on the argument and not on the writing. The writing should create a seamless congruency between the writer’s thoughts, so seamless that the reader does not take note of the writing itself.

As a result of reading hundreds of student created documents and engaging students in meetings where the writings were discussed, many of these novice writers voice concern with the repeated use of transition phrases, e.g. first, next, therefore, and in addition. The reader subconsciously picks up the overuse of transition phrases and it becomes a distraction for the reader resulting in the reader paying less attention to the argument. An overlooked transition phrase that can effectively and persuasively connect two or more phrases is the Not only ... but also transition. Using this phrase effectively will also intensify the important use of repetitious words and phrases to move the argument forward.

Readers will often take effective transitions for granted. Not only are effective transitions a subliminal signal to the reader that the writer has engaged in a process meant to minimize confusion and wastes the reader’s time but transitions are difficult to create. The writer must deal with transitions on a cerebral level that keeps the reader's needs first and foremost when crafting the document.

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