

# Writer's Edge

By Ingrid Sapona

Welcome to Writer's Edge — a column by Ingrid Sapona, owner of Good with Words. In her column, Ingrid will write about ways of improving your communication skills. Many of you already know Ingrid — she's been working with the CICBV and CBVs for more than 10 years and is the creator and presenter of the popular seminar: Valuation Reports and Opinions: Your Stock In Trade — Are they as clear as can be?

Ingrid welcomes your feedback, questions, and suggestions for topics you'd be interested in reading about. Drop Ingrid a line at: [ingrid@goodwithwords.com](mailto:ingrid@goodwithwords.com), or call 416-259-3399.

## Are Your Readers Taking Your Cue?

A few years ago I wrote about applying storytelling techniques to report writing.<sup>1</sup> One of the techniques I mentioned was using connecting or linking phrases — things like: “As a result”, “even so,” “in fact,” and so on. In this column we're going to take a closer look at these kinds of words and phrases, which I refer to as transitions.

## Why Transitions are Important

Most business communications are not just lists of facts or ideas — they're written representations of coherent thoughts the author wants to communicate to a particular audience for a specific reason. Given these purposes, it's in the writer's interest to help the reader understand how their ideas and thoughts are connected. Transitions express relationships between ideas and signal how the ideas flow within the author's line of reasoning.<sup>2</sup>

## Types of Transitions

Transitions fall into two main categories: generic transitions and substantive transitions.<sup>3</sup>

Generic transitions are cues that help keep readers on track. They can signal a variety of things, including: contrast (for example: “on the other hand”), comparison (for example: “similarly”), cause and effect (for example: “therefore”), emphasis (for example: “in fact”) sequence (for example: “first”), timing (for example: “earlier”), conclusions (for example: “in short”), and so on.

Here are some examples of generic transitions:

As a result	Similarly
However	Above all
Because	In conclusion
Of course	In other words
Therefore	Instead
In contrast	To illustrate
Alternatively	Finally
In addition	In such situations
Even so	Even though

<sup>1</sup> See *The Business Valuator*, Vol. 35, Issue 1 (March 2010), pp. 15-16

<sup>2</sup> See *The Legal Writing Handbook*, by Laurel Currie Oates, Anne Enquist, Kelly Kunsch, Aspen Publishers, Inc. (2002), at p. 613. [Hereafter referred to as Oats, Enquist, and Kunsch.]

<sup>3</sup> Though Oats, Enquist, and Kunsch talk about three categories, for purposes of this article I have chosen to focus on two they mention: generic and substantive. Many of the ideas I discuss in this article are derived from Oats, Enquist and Kunsch (pp. 613-618)

Also	In
Unfortunately	Clearly
Still	Yet
Eventually	Recently

When using a transition, be sure to choose carefully because they carry subtly different meanings. (For example, “earlier” and “since” both convey timing, but they are not synonyms.)

Substantive transitions provide connections and new content. In this type of transition the author typically reiterates or refers to a point made in a previous sentence and then adds to it, or perhaps offers a point in contrast. Here’s an example:

You can avoid provincial probate tax by transferring assets outside your will. *One way to do this* is through joint ownership.

See how the italicized phrase refers back to the idea mentioned in the first sentence, but then builds on it?

Here’s an example of a substantive transition that refers back to an idea mentioned in the first sentence, but then offers a contrast:

The expert for the other shareholder applied the XYZ method. *Though that method is viable*, CRA has consistently rejected it in cases like this.

## Placement of Transitions

Given their role as cues to the reader, the best place to put transitions is usually at the point of connection. Compare the usefulness of the transitional phrase in these two passages:

The judge rejected the plaintiff’s valuation evidence because it was not prepared by a CBV.  
The judge dismissed the plaintiff’s case *as a result*.

The judge rejected the plaintiff’s valuation evidence because it was not prepared by a CBV.  
*As a result*, the judge dismissed the plaintiff’s case.

Clearly, “as a result” is a more useful cue in the second example than in the first.

## Why Not Add Connectors?

There seem to be two main reasons some professionals don’t use transitions enough in their writing. Sometimes they don’t include transitions because the connection between the ideas they’re writing about seem obvious to them. This often happens when they’ve been working on something for some time and they’re so familiar with the information, they forget to consider whether the logic is clear to a reader who is not as well versed in the matter.

I’ve also run across professionals who consciously omit transitions in the name of being concise. While being concise is a virtue, never sacrifice clarity for the sake of saving a few words. If you use connectors well, readers often don’t even notice them because they’re able to follow the logic effortlessly.

## Conclusion

Being generous — but careful — in your use of transitions will help keep your readers interested and will help them understand your thought process and the information you’re conveying. The end result will be a well-informed reader, which, after all, is the goal of all business writing.

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