

Staying Connected

If the links in a chain aren't connected, they're just a bunch of metal loops—not very useful for towing a car, holding back a crowd, or keeping a wandering dog in its yard. Written paragraphs operate pretty much the same way. Sentences and ideas need to be connected for the writing to work. Break the chain, and you force your reader to make his or her own connections.

Connections, or links, in writing are called *transitions*. Writers use transitions to enhance readers' understanding of how one idea or sentence relates to another. Smooth, appropriate transitions also allow readers to spend their mental energy concentrating on the writer's ideas, rather than on forging word chains.

Sharing an Example: Leaving Home

Author Sneed B. Collard III begins his book *Leaving Home* with the statement, "Sooner or later, we all leave home." Read the following two paragraphs about whales and Gila monsters and how they leave the "comforts" of home. The transition words and phrases have been highlighted for you. As you read, notice how the transition words connect ideas about leaving home.

Each winter, mother gray whales give birth to their calves in warm lagoons along the Pacific coast of Mexico. The calves nurse for several weeks. In spring, they accompany their mothers on a 7,000-mile journey to northern coastal feeding grounds. No one is sure how, but the whales know exactly where they are going and often show up at the same feeding grounds year after year. In the fall, the young whales find their way back to Mexico completely on their own.



Unlike whales, Gila monsters and most other animals are born without knowing exactly where they should go. But most animal babies do have instincts to guide them. Once they hatch or are born, their instincts may tell them to follow certain smells, seek out water, or find holes to live in. Many young animals make mistakes and die or are eaten, but the fortunate ones find the food, water, and shelter they need to survive.

Sneed B. Collard III, *Leaving Home* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002).

Words That Connect

Take a look now at a more comprehensive list of transitions, transitional phrases, and linking words below. Notice how the words and phrases have been categorized based on purpose.

Transitions

Words that can be used to **show location:**

above	behind	by	near	throughout
across	below	down	off	to the right
against	beneath	in back of	onto	under
along	beside	in front of	on top of	
among	between	inside	outside	
around	beyond	into	over	

Words that can be used to **show time:**

while	first	meanwhile	soon	then
after	second	today	later	next
at	third	tomorrow	afterward	as soon as
before	now	next week	immediately	when
during	until	yesterday	finally	suddenly

name:

date:

Words that can be used to **compare** two things:

likewise	as	while	in the same way
like	also	similarly	

Words that can be used to **contrast** two things (show differences between them):

but	still	although	on the other hand
however	yet	otherwise	even though

Patrick Sebranek, Dave Kemper, Verne Meyer, *Write Source 2000* (Wilmington, MA: Great Source Education Group, 1999), p. 106.

Time to Practice

Here is a passage from *Miracle's Boys* by Jacqueline Woodson. Carefully read the passage and underline any transitions that you find.

Ty'ree was all right after Mama died. But I was all wrong. The year before, I'd seen this show about snakes. They showed this one snake slipping out of its old skin and then leaving that old skin on the ground behind him. That's how I felt—like Mama'd been my skin. But I hadn't grown a new skin underneath, like that snake had. I was just blood and bones spreading all over the place. Every night Ty'ree stayed with me in my room till I cried myself to sleep. And the next morning he'd find me sleeping curled up on the floor beside his bed.

After a few weeks of me ending up on the floor, he called Aunt Cecile, and she came back to New York and asked around trying to find a doctor I could go to—a psychologist. Some afternoons I'd come home from school to find Aunt Cecile sitting at the dining room table writing down and crossing out numbers as she talked on the phone. And some evenings I'd catch her and Ty'ree whispering about different doctors, their fees, and social benefits.

Then one afternoon Aunt Cecile announced that she'd found a person I could talk to named Dr. Vernon. That Wednesday and for a whole lot of Wednesdays after that, Aunt Cecile would take me to Dr. Vernon—an old man with a nice office in Harlem.

Jacqueline Woodson, *Miracle's Boys* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2000), pp. 83–84.

Connect the Links to Make a Chain

Carefully read the next passage. If you come across a transition that sounds awkward, cross it out, and if a transition is needed, replace it with a stronger one. Use the list from pages 34–35 to help you find just the right word or phrase to link ideas in a way that makes sense. **Linking Secret:** If it helps you create smoother transitions, reword the sentences.

I'm not sure how it happened; therefore, my room is a disaster! There are clothes, books, and games everywhere, including on the floor. Clean and dirty clothes are piled on chairs and across my bed. Second, the space that is supposed to be my desk is too cluttered to work on. Finally, my mom is even wondering where the carpet went because she can't see any trace of it. My dad says to forget about the carpet. All he cares about is where the awful smell is coming from. To begin with, that smell has gotten so bad I won't even have any friends come over. As a result, I'm going to clean my room before I lose all contact with my friends, lose all my valuable stuff, or am grounded by my parents. I could be cited for a fire hazard, and then I will have more trouble!

A Writer's Question

Select a recent piece of writing from your folder. Circle the transitions lightly with a pencil so they stand out. Do your transitions link important details to one another and to your main idea? Rate your transitions by putting an X where you think your writing fits.

- _____ Transitions? They're nonexistent!
- _____ A few good ones, but some replacements are needed.
- _____ Strong, smooth transitions!

