

## What Are Transitions and Why Do They Matter?

**Brief:** Transitions are essential signposts that guide an audience through all of the parts of a public speech.

**Learning Objective:** Explain the importance of transitions.

**Key Terms:**

- **Transition:** A word or phrase connecting one part of a discourse to another.

### Role of Transitions

After you've selected your topic, purpose, and thesis; identified your main points and sub-points; and developed your introduction and conclusion, you'll finally be ready to develop your transitions. Transitions are essential signposts that guide your audience through all of the parts of your speech.

### *The Importance of Transitions*

Imagine that you're driving, trying to get from point A to point B. At the beginning of your trip, you see a sign indicating that you're heading in the right direction. Trusting the sign, you keep driving. You follow that road wherever it winds. You move past detours and forks in the road. You keep going, but you don't see additional signs pointing you towards your destination. You're in a remote area and your GPS doesn't work. Are you going the right way? Where are the signs to help you chart your course?



Just as you did in this imaginary situation, members of your audience will do their best to follow you as you speak. However, if your speech takes detours, will your audience make the correct connections or get lost?

There's also a good chance that members of your audience will tune you out at some point during your delivery. When they tune back in, will they wonder how you moved from talking about X to talking about Y? Will they be able to figure out how you got to where you are?

Proper transitions help to keep your audience on track, secure in the knowledge that they know where you are and where you're taking them. Using transitions allows your audience to follow

your presentation. The words you use can lead them along, signal that you are moving from one point to another, or signal that you are stressing a point.

## Transition Pitfalls

When executed well, speech transitions help make a speech understandable. However, poorly chosen speech transitions can actually confuse and frustrate audiences.

When developing your transitions, you should avoid:

Transitions that are used inconsistently

For example, if you start with numbering such as *first*, *second*, *third*... don't progress to *next*, *next*.... Your audience will notice and likely feel uncomfortable with the break in the sequence.

Transitions that take a speaker off topic

Phrases like "Oh, and that reminds me of another thing...." indicate digressions that are likely to dilute your purpose and confuse your audience.

Transitions that do not follow the expected sequence of thought

For example, if you use the word "however" as a transition, you need to follow it with a counterpoint. "This happened, *however* the result was that this other unexpected thing happened...." If you don't follow *however* with a counterpoint, you're not following the expected sequence of thought. This will confuse your audience and cause them to lose track.

## From Concept to Action

First consider how you're going to move from your introduction to the body of your speech. Craft the first sentence of your body paragraph, bridging the gap between these two parts of your speech. How does this first transition reflect the organizational structure of your speech? What will you need to keep in mind as you develop the remainder of your transitions?

### OER IMAGE SOURCES:

"Car Trip Road Trip Travel Map Journey Vehicle." Pixabay. <https://pixabay.com/illustrations/car-trip-road-trip-travel-map-3880508/>. Accessed 9 May 2019. [CC0]

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