

Writing Spaces

Assignments & Activities Archive

Beyond Transition Words

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Overview

When students think about cohesion and coherence, many of them think about transition words. While transition words are useful, they are not the only coherence moves available, especially when it comes to longer essays. The purpose of this activity is to help students add to their repertoires of coherence moves. In this activity, students will explore how to add coherence to longer argumentative essays through moves such as “summing up and forecasting” (Fahnestock 386). This activity includes a short lecture, group work, whole-class discussion, and reflection, and can be productively paired with *Writing Spaces* chapters on rhetorical figures (FitzGerald, “Writing with Flair”), imitation (Meyer, “The Evolution of Imitation: Building Your Style”), and genre moves (Jacobson, Pawlowski, and Tardy, “Make Your ‘Move’: Writing in Genres”).

Time Commitment

15-20 minutes

Materials

The teacher should provide students with a selection of example argumentative essays for students to analyze. The teacher should try to select examples which do go beyond just using transition words.

Activity Process

- Students begin by briefly reflecting on what they have heard and already know about moves for transitioning from one essay passage to another. The instructor can echo each response. The instructor might also prompt students to

consider transition words and other types of meta-discourse.

- Once students have activated this background knowledge, the instructor briefly notes that there are other moves for transitioning, including whole sentences and even short passages to help readers recognize and follow the structure of the essay.
- Next, students divide into small groups. Students then skim through example essays, noting how each writer both reviews what they have already said and introduces what they will discuss next.
- After students have had the opportunity to analyze the example essays, the instructor invites students to share their findings and attempt to classify the kinds of transition moves that they have identified which go beyond just using transition words. If transition moves are rare, the instructor might also invite students to suggest sentences that might help connect passages more effectively. At this point, the instructor is welcome to promote declarative knowledge by providing some common names for these moves.
- Finally, the instructor will invite students to select one of these transition moves that they might imitate and apply to their own compositions.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity will:

- Notice transitional moves writers make to create coherence.
- Classify and name these transitional moves.
- Build their repertoires of coherence moves that they can practice and apply in their own compositions.

Learning Accommodations

- Depending on your classroom group work dynamics, consider the extent to which you might need to specify roles within groups. Ideally, students will help one another identify transitional moves and actively negotiate names for these moves.
- This activity can be adapted for delivery in a synchronous or asynchronous online course. For an asynchronous online course, the beginning reflection and orientation can be part of an activity prompt. The analysis portion can be performed in a document sharing and annotation app. Student groups could asynchronously work on different stages of the activity. For example, students with last names A-C could focus on marking the passages, students with last names D-P could focus on naming the moves, and students with last names Q-Z could suggest ways to improve these transitional passages. A separate follow up discussion board could ask students to share and practice transition moves.
- Remind students that the transitional moves in the example essays are only some possibilities. Invite students to continue looking for these and other moves as they read other articles.

Works Cited

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Further Reading

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Transition*. Maui Arthoughts Co., 2008.

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Grace*. 12th ed. Pearson, 2016.