Speech Transitions

What: Transitions are your way of letting your audience know that you are changing ideas. It is generally best to write clear and concise complete sentences for your transitions.

Why: Your presentation organization should be crystal clear to the audience. The organization starts with a clear preview in the introduction (see the “Introductions & Conclusions” handout), but transitions serve a vital role in keeping the audience on the same page.

When: Use transitions every time you change ideas. As a general rule, you should use transitions after your introduction, between each main point, and before your conclusion.

Most importantly, transitions need to signal to the audience that you are shifting ideas. Here are some suggestions for transition styles:

Review-preview: What you just said, then what you are about to say

Examples: Now that we’ve established a need for fundraising, let’s see which fundraisers might be most effective. I will focus on two types of fundraisers: silent auctions and sales.

In short, fundraising efforts are needed because of budget reductions and increased expenses. Next, we’ll look at our fundraising options.

Rhetorical Questions: A leading question that doesn’t invite an actual response, followed by the answer that you want

Example: Will fundraising be too expensive to start up? Well, actually, it’s cheaper than the alternative.

Signposting: By including certain words in your transitions, you can alert your audience that you are about to switch ideas. Start with a signpost word and then complete the sentence for a transition.

Signpost Words: next, first, last, we now turn, on the other hand, finally, now let’s consider, if you think that’s shocking, similarly, and yet, altogether, at present, etc.

Examples: Keeping these points in mind about Japanese internment camps, let’s look at their historical context.

Now that we understand differential equations, consider this problem.

Secondly, time can’t repeat itself.
If you think that’s shocking, you will be really surprised by their re-admittance rates.

**Themed transitions:** Be creative! For example, some speakers choose to carry out a theme throughout the speech.

Examples:

Let’s begin our journey by looking at the panhandle of Texas... The next stop on our journey is East Texas, known for its lush forests... Next we will drive down to South Texas to explore the Valley... etc.

Another option is to carry a story or example throughout the speech. Let’s say you tell a shocking story about a college student named Sara contracting bacterial meningitis in the introduction. The transitions might look something like this:

Like Sara, you are at risk for contracting bacterial meningitis. Let’s talk more specifically about how you can contract the disease. (transition from introduction to first main point)

Unlike Sara, you have the ability to prevent bacterial meningitis. (transition into second main point)

So, I encourage you to keep Sara’s story in mind as you make decisions over the next few stressful weeks. (transition into the conclusion)

Remember, no speech is really finished without transitions. For more ideas, reference some of the texts in our Speaking Center Library or schedule a conference with one of the consultants. You might also want to take a look at our “Basic Outline Format for a Speech” handout to see how to fit transitions into your presentation outline.