# **Paragraphs and Transitions**

Even the most well-researched piece of science writing will fail to make an impact if it is not easy to read and interpret. The trick to organizing your writing is to develop a writing outline before you put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard). More information on outlines can be found on our [outlining resource](https://scwrl.ubc.ca/stem-writing-resources/strategies-for-writing/outlining/).

There are three key things that you can focus on to make sure that your writing is well organized. Firstly, you can split it into paragraphs based on content. Secondly, you can write effective topic sentences to kick off each paragraph with, and thirdly, you can ensure each sentence flows smoothly into the next by making sure your transitions are well chosen.

**Paragraphs**

Paragraphs are extremely important components of an effectively structured piece of writing because they organize material in a way that makes it easier to follow for your readers. Structuring your writing into clear, effective paragraphs that address individual ideas will help you organize your work, which in turn gives your readers the best possible chance of understanding the points you are trying to make.

Here are some strategies for writing clear paragraphs:

* Have a clear topic sentence. Make sure that the first sentence of your paragraph clearly captures the main point of your paragraph. This establishes the topic of the paragraph and sets up the readers expectations.
* Provide evidence to fully support the main point. Each sentence in the paragraph should expand upon or support the topic sentence.
* The relationship between the topic sentence and the concluding sentence should be clear. If not, it is possible that the purpose of the paragraph may have changed midway through. If this happens, consider rewriting the topic sentence to reflect what the paragraph actually does, or breaking the paragraph into smaller parts.

**Transitions**

Transitions are a great way to make sure that your ideas are connected.

An effective transition should do at least two of the following three things. It should:

1. Signal the point at which you are shifting to another idea.
2. Act as a preparatory signpost for what is coming up next.
3. Explain to the reader how each idea is connected.

For example, compare the following two sentences:

**A1 (Poor transitions):** “Global warming will have negative consequences for polar bears. As temperatures rise they will have a smaller habitat in which to live. **Also**, there will be less food available for them because there will be smaller populations of krill. **Polar bear populations** are thus affected by the amount of ice available.”

**B1 (Good transitions):** “Global warming will have negative consequences for polar bears for two main reasons. **Firstly**, because increased temperatures cause increased melting of ice on which the bears live, there will be a reduced area in which they can live. **Secondly**, many species that polar bears rely on for food will be less numerous than in the past because their main food source, krill, can only breed successfully underneath ice. **Therefore**, the reduction of ice is the key factor in limiting polar bear populations.”

B1 is better than A1 because:

1. **Each transition informs the reader that a new idea is about to be elaborated on**
2. **Each sentence begins with a ‘signpost’ that links it to the next one**
3. **Each transition connects the points made in the whole text with one another**

**Further reading:**

* [BC Campus’ Technical Writing Essentials: Transitional Words and Phrases for University Writing](https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/technicalwriting/chapter/appendixd-transitionalwords/)