

Lesson 3: Appropriate Use of Transitions

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| Instructor Name | Devon Jancin |
| Lesson Date (hypothetical) | Week 5 “Revising Your Rhetorical Critique” |
| Subject Area | English composition and rhetoric |
| Institutional Level | Mainstream college undergraduate (high proficiency level required) |
| Activity Topic(s) | Appropriate use of transitions |
| Instructional Group | CO150 International students |

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will examine concordance lines of selected transitional phrases and use them to inductively formulate correct patterns of usage and grammar.
2. Students will be able to notice improperly used transitions in their own papers.
3. Students will self-correct transition errors in their drafts to increase the readability of their papers.

LEARNER BACKGROUND/PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Students have already been exposed to COCA in Week 1. A class period was devoted to going through a basic tutorial of what COCA is, its basic functions, and how corpora might be useful. Students completed a homework assignment where they ran several basic searches for specific words in COCA. Therefore, the class is familiar with what concordance lines are, and has some experience inferring conclusions from them.

Currently in Week 4, students have already completed their first big assignment—an academic summary. They are now being introduced to the analytical response. Their overall purpose is to state what the author’s purpose is, then answer and explain to what extent the author achieved their purpose with their intended audience. This assignment uses the same article as the previously completed academic summary (meaning at this point, they have a thorough understanding of what they’ve read).

This corpus-based activity comes in during the revision process of this assignment. Comprehensible development of the ideas in writing is often limited by a lack of transitional phrases (Weber & Stolley, n.d.). Therefore, students were given a handout

with suggested transitions to use in their paper. However, I as the teacher noticed that students are often misusing these transitional phrases, greatly decreasing the comprehensibility of their ideas. This activity is designed to help students notice and self-correct transitions that are incorrectly used. Students have turned in the first draft of their essays for feedback. I as the teacher have taken note of the most common transitional phrase errors, and have run these through COCA (see Appendix 3).

MATERIALS

1. (Teacher pre-planning) Access to COCA → word search → academic genre
2. (Teacher pre-planning) Time to review students' first drafts, notice patterns of error
3. Most common transitional phrases concordance line worksheet (see Appendix 3)

ACTIVITY DEVELOPMENT

1. Tell students that now that they have written their first draft, we are able to move focus from rhetorical content concerns like purpose and audience and more on writing conventions. *For example, while I was reading your essays, I noticed a common problem—sometimes the ideas in your papers are not clearly connected. This makes it more difficult for the reader to understand your meaning. I want to do an activity where you can study and discuss how some specific transitions are used in other academic English writing. We are going to use COCA. This will help you be able to self-correct your own papers for your final draft.*
2. (In-class brainstorm) *What words or phrases can we use in English to connect ideas?* (write these on the board)
3. *Out of all of our words here, I noticed these are the ones you are having the most trouble with. (circle but, and (see Set A in Appendix 3), however, additionally (Set B), because, since (Set C)). (Individual work) Take a few minutes and underline all of these transitions that you see in your own paper.*
4. *Ok, now we are going to use COCA concordance lines to try and figure out how American English academic writing uses these.* (jigsaw small groups of 3, pass out Appendix 3). Each group will focus on comparing either set A, B, or C.
5. After small groups examine their concordance lines and discuss the questions in small groups, the whole class comes together and reports on what they found. *Group A, what did you notice about your 2 transitions?* On the overhead, I fill out the worksheet questions with student deductions, modifying and clarifying student responses as needed. This is to facilitate learning for students who have difficulty with inductive learning. By discussing group findings and then having the teacher model the completion of the worksheet, students get the meaningful interaction of inductive learning and the structure and

guidance of deductive learning in one activity. For expected student responses to guide the completion of the worksheet see the italics in Appendix 3.

6. Once I have helped clarify the regular usage and grammatical patterns of these transitions for students via discussion and overhead note-taking, the students have time for self-editing using the transitions they've underlined in their papers and the information from Appendix 3.
7. I walk around the room, giving individual help, and encouraging peers to help one another in order to clarify context-specific usage questions.

CLOSURE

To bring closure to the activity, I will encourage students to continue the process of self-correcting their own writing for the final draft. I will stress the importance of clear and appropriate transitions in academic writing.

For homework: *I want everyone to finish going through your drafts and self-editing your paper. Pay particular attention to your transitions: Are you using the ones you have correctly? Are there places where you don't have a transition connecting your ideas but you should? You will get homework points for this work next class period.*