

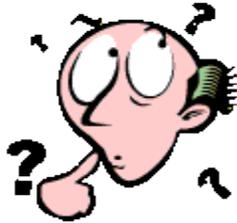
Coherence and Transitions

In writing, the term *coherence* is often used to indicate how well your sentences and ideas “flow,” or connect.

Consider the following two sentences:

John is a fast reader.

He was the last student in the class to finish the book.



If we look at these two sentences, we realize that the first sentence really contradicts the second sentence. If John is such a fast reader, why was he the last one to finish? At least this is the question that will occur to the readers. In other words, there is a gap, or hole between the information that is being presented in these two sentences, and as a result, the one sentence does not flow smoothly into the next. Now let's reexamine these two sentences with the following word added:

- John is a fast reader, **but** he was the last student in the class to finish the book.

The simple addition of the word *but* acknowledges that there is a contradiction and even prepares the reader for it. Suddenly putting these two sentences together is no longer a problem because we have added a **transitional word** – in this case, the conjunction *but*.

Now let's look at the following example:

There are two primary issues to remember when we use the word gender. How do we define gender? When we talk about gender we are really talking about something other than sex. Sex is biological. It is solely dependent upon the anatomical characteristics of the individual. Gender is much more fluid and diverse than sex. Gender is performative: it is all about how we speak, dress, move, etc. Gender is all about the roles we assume in society. Gender often dictates the jobs we hold, our relationship to others, and the hobbies we enjoy.

We must consider nature vs. nurture. What determines those aspects of gender which are, indeed, performative? Are we born with certain predispositions which channel us into certain behaviors and abilities, or are we taught by society that these attributes and characteristics are appropriate to our gender? We must ask ourselves the following question: Were we born with a desire to wear a pink cap or a blue one? How many men do you know who would never be caught dead wearing pink?

Now examine the same two paragraphs with some slight revisions:



There are two primary issues to remember when we use the word gender. **The first** is how we define gender. When we talk about gender we are really talking about something other than sex. Sex is biological. It is solely dependent upon the anatomical characteristics of the individual. Gender, **however**, is much more fluid and diverse than sex. Gender is performative: it is all about how we speak, dress, move, etc. Gender is **also** all about the roles we assume in society. **In other words**, gender often dictates the jobs we hold, our relationship to others, and the hobbies we enjoy.

The second issue to consider is that of nature vs. nurture. What determines those aspects of gender which are, indeed, performative? Are we born with certain predispositions which channel us into certain behaviors and abilities, or are we taught by society that these attributes and characteristics are appropriate to our gender? Another way to look at this is to ask ourselves the following question: Were we born with a desire to wear a pink cap or a blue one? Yet how many men do you know who would never be caught dead wearing pink?

Notice how much easier these paragraphs are to read and understand with the additions of the transitional words and phrases (the ones in blue). Not only is it easier to see the connection of each sentence to each other, but the transitional phrase that introduces the second paragraph helps to connect the two paragraphs, preparing the reader for the fact that this paragraph will now talk about the second of the “two issues” that were introduced at the beginning of the first paragraph.

This piece of writing also just plain *sounds* better; there is a sense of “flow” to the writing, something that students often say their writing lacks.