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'Transitions Between Paragraphs'

By Stuart Corrigan

My Step 9 lays out the transition bits you use to get from sentence to sentence, or thought to thought, within your paragraphs, so your writing makes sense and doesn't sound choppy.

- But what about transitioning between paragraphs?
- How do you get logically and smoothly from the end of one to the beginning of the next?

You can use the very same Step 9 transition bits if you want to, or – here is a new concept, a little more advanced than what's in the book – you can use sentence fragments, like we do in conversation.

- How do you use the transition-bit option?

Splice a transition bit into the first sentence of the follow-on paragraph.

Choose one that makes good sense, given what came before.

It looks like this:

'But the mood of the country is turning sour...'

'Our sales in Asia have slumped, however...'

'Nevertheless, kids do get a lot from organized sports...'

'A second fundraiser that works is the bake sale...'

- How do you use the sentence-fragment option?

Read your two paragraphs out loud and see if your speaking voice prompts you to add a little smoothing bit.

If your last paragraph had said that 'people in Sydney, Australia, are sending worried letters to their mayor about rampaging koalas', and your follow-on paragraph shows why they're worried, you could put a squib like this right at the start of that second paragraph:

'And so they should worry...'

These you don't splice into your first sentence. You leave that alone.

Here's another:

If you've just said that 'vampires are pretty awful', but you're about to say, in the next paragraph, that 'some of them aren't so bad', you could say:

'Not that vampires are all bad...'

Or if you'd just said that 'harpooning is the only way to deal with teenage vandals', but next you're going to suggest that 'counselling and voodoo are possibly better solutions', you start your follow-on paragraph with something like this:

'Or maybe not...'

Both these techniques bug a lot of people, especially teachers. That's because teachers worry that adolescents don't take sentence structure seriously enough, and shouldn't be encouraged to write in sound-bites, which is what these are. And then, because a lot of us never get past the adolescent writing level, we carry our teachers' biases with us.

Well, adolescent or not, if you've followed my steps this far, you're writing beyond that level, and you're therefore entitled to use these techniques. In fact, you should use them.

It's things like this that ultimately make a Nabokov different from dull writers with good grammar but no sense of what the language can do. Writing experts, like you're becoming, just do these things.

Van Cliburn is expected to interpret Chopin in his masterful way, after all, and not like some piano student. And nobody quibbles with Michael Jordan's lay-ups. So ignore the pedants, who may insist that you can't start a paragraph with 'and', or something like that, and do it anyway. **Yes, you can!**