



Does My Writing Flow?

One of the most frequent questions writers ask themselves or others is “does my writing *flow*?” Other variations of this question include “does this make sense?” and “can you understand what I am saying?” The term *flow* is a vague term that writers use when describing some concern of clarity, coherence, or conciseness. However vague this term may be, writers know it is a very important concern about their work. If you find yourself concerned about the *flow* of your writing, then here are some strategies to improve it.

1. Pretend you are the reader of your paper.

- Often when we write, our work makes sense to us because we are the ones who create it. However, at a certain point in the writing process, our writing may become unclear even to us. When we as authors begin to lose sight of our paper’s train of thought, other readers are sure to be confused as well.
- By looking at your paper from the perspective of a reader, you are *checking* and *making sure* your writing is clear to someone who might not be as informed of the paper’s topic as you are.
- Some questions you might ask to place yourself in the reader’s shoes are:
 - i. Would my classmates be able to understand the level of vocabulary I am using?
 - ii. How do my body paragraphs connect back to my thesis, and is the connection easy to see?
 - iii. Would someone not in my class understand what I am trying to say?

2. Reverse-outlining

- Outlining is not only a great pre-writing exercise, but it also can serve as a great post-writing tool. Reverse-outlining means just what it sounds like. It breaks down an already written essay into its basic parts (such as thesis statement, topic-sentences, and the points of proof/explanation used within your body paragraphs), and it allows a writer to see how well topic sentences and paragraphs fit into an essay.
- Here is how to reverse outline:
 - i. Write down the thesis statement
 - ii. Write down each topic sentence of each body paragraph
 1. Also write down the main points of evidence or explanation used within your body paragraphs.
 - iii. Check every topic sentence and make sure it is clearly related to a part of your thesis statement.
 - iv. Check all points of proof/explanation and make sure they pertain to the topic of the paragraph and provide adequate support.
 - v. If there is a topic sentences that does not clearly relate to the thesis statement, then either revise it and its supporting points of proof/explanation or take it out entirely.



- If it is easy to write a reverse outline, then it's a good sign that your paper is well-organized. If you have a hard time creating a reverse outline, then your thesis statement and topic-sentences might be unclear.
- 3. Add Headings and Sections to your paper**
- If you are not up to making a complete outline (or if you are not very good at outlining – lots of people aren't), then no need to feel bad. You can add headings and sections to your paper. This method achieves a similar effect to reverse outlining.
 - By splitting a paper into sections and sub-sections with headings, the paper is telling the reader what each part is all about.
 - For most papers, headings are not necessary. However, you can still make use of them as a tool for drafting and revision. By adding headers to the different sections of a paper, you can easily begin to see the main “parts” of your paper and how they work together.
- 4. Use Transitions or “Flow” Keywords**
- Using appropriate transition words improves the flow of your paper. These words act as guide posts, indicating the relationship between thoughts, sentences, or paragraphs. You can always make your essay “flow better” by adding appropriate transitional words and phrases.

Here is a handy list of transitional words and phrases you can use to improve the “flow” of your paper:

Transitional words and phrases:

- **To show causes and effects:** accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, hence, so, then, therefore, thus
- **To show comparison:** also, in the same way, likewise, similarly
- **To show contrasts or exceptions:** although, but, even though, however, in contrast, instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the contrary, on the one hand . . . on the other hand, still, yet
- **To show examples:** even, for example, for instance, indeed, in fact, of course, such as
- **To show place or position:** above, adjacent to, below, beyond, finally, furthermore, last, moreover, next, too
- **To show time:** after, as soon as, at first, at the same time, before, eventually, finally, immediately, later, meanwhile, next, simultaneously, so far, soon, then, thereafter
- **To signal a summary or conclusion:** as a result, as we have seen, finally, in a word, in any event, in brief, in conclusion, in other words, in short, in the end, in a final analysis, on the whole, therefore, thus, to summarize.