

PARAGRAPH IMPROVEMENT EXERCISES

TOPIC STATEMENT EXERCISE

The Situation:

The following paragraph has been written by a sports journalism student whose essay assignment requires him to argue that a change in philosophy by coaches of elite Canadian minor hockey teams has led to a trend toward smaller, creative hockey players in the NHL. This particular paragraph argues that a new crop of smaller, skilled forwards is about to join Sidney Crosby, Alexander Ovechkin, and Evgeni Malkin as the NHL's most exciting young players. However, the paragraph lacks a topic statement.

Write a topic statement for the paragraph: (This statement must provide a comprehensive introduction to the scope and purpose of the paragraph and it must set up a connection among the six sentences that develop this paragraph's main idea.)

Patrick Kane will have an immediate impact with the Chicago Blackhawks—his speed, skill, and hockey smarts compensate for his slight frame. Sam Gagner and Jonathan Toews may need another year of seasoning, but both will soon be offensive threats with their NHL teams. Angelo Esposito has big-league moves and a deadly shot, but he needs to work on his defensive game. In two years, 6' 170 lb. Kyle Turris may be the best of these young guns. Against the Russians this summer, Turris effortlessly made the jump from Tier 2 Jr. "A." Incidentally, these five players average 5'10" and 178 lbs.

TRANSITIONS EXERCISE

The Situation:

The following paragraph advises against spending money to "buy" friends. Its first two sentences combine to state the paragraph's main point, its topic statement. The remaining five sentences develop that point, but the entire paragraph lacks a smooth flow. The order of sentences is logical and the paragraph repeats key words, but several transitions need to be injected.

Insert transitions in this paragraph: (See the transitional techniques on the following page.)

Wads of cash can't make a lonely person happy. Spending money to attract "friends" can actually make the spender more unhappy. Some people try to buy friends and the self-esteem that comes from being popular. This strategy usually backfires. "Good timers" may hang around as long as the money is flowing. They will be gone when the money runs out. They're not interested in being true friends. They're interested in having fun at somebody else's expense.

Here's another paragraph that requires transitional words and/or phrases:

Doctors may be excellent at diagnosing ailments. Many have difficulty explaining their diagnoses. They deal with complex analyses of symptoms and underlying causes. They don't know how to explain them in layman's terms. Their patients become confused and frightened.

TRANSITIONAL TECHNIQUES

1. Use the following transitional words in your daily writing:
 - ◆ **go-ahead words** – *and, therefore, furthermore, also, for instance*
 - ◆ **new-idea words** – *thus, so, and so, therefore, consequently*
 - ◆ **summary words** – *as a result, at last, finally, in conclusion*
 - ◆ **change-idea words** – *but, yet, nevertheless, otherwise, although, despite, however, conversely*
 - ◆ **link-cause-and-effect words** – *that caused, as a result, that produced, consequently*
 - ◆ **referring words** – *they, these, though, not one, all but two, without exception*
 - ◆ **restricting and qualifying words** – *provided, in case, if, lest, when, occasionally, even if, never*

2. Use other techniques as well:
 - ◆ **use clear pronoun references** – ensure that *it* or *this* or *he* or *they* could refer to only one antecedent
 - ◆ **repeat key words and phrases** – the repetition provides emphasis as well as “paragraph glue”
 - ◆ **use direct phrasing that clearly links to previous sentences**
 - ◆ **use lists to provide continuity without resorting to extra transitional words**