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Keep Your Transitional Hooks Subtle

Do not begin a sentence with the proper name that ended the previous sentence

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"The most convincing ideas in the world, expressed in the most beautiful sentences, will move no one unless those ideas are properly connected. Unless readers can move easily from one thought to another, they will surely find something else to read or turn on the television."

— *The Guide to Grammar and Writing*, See <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/transitions.htm>

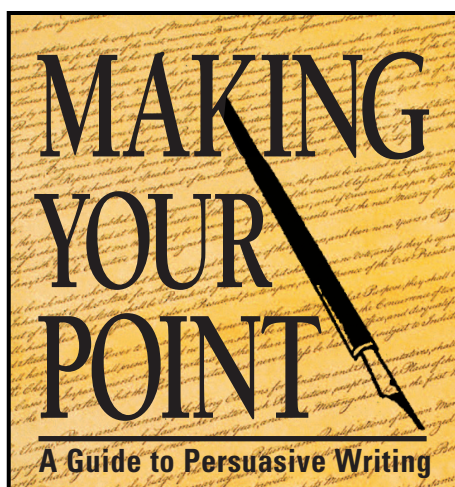
The "flow" of writing is a function of the ease with which the reader moves from one sentence to the next and of the grip with which the prose draws the reader along. Writers cultivate flow with, among other things, narrative interest, varied sentence length, parallel construction, alliteration, logic and transitions, including those that connect (e.g., "and," "or"); create time sequence ("next," "thereafter"); compare or contrast ("similarly," "instead"); exemplify or summarize ("For example," "In short"); or echo thoughts from prior sentences by repeating words or phrases.

This column deals with the echo form of transition, which links sentences

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and paragraphs by keeping the reader focused on the subject of the story and by assuring the reader that the subject hasn't changed.

Words repeated in successive sentences or paragraphs are sometimes



called "hooks," an example of which is as follows:

Smith admitted that the sole basis for his opinion was *a document*, missing several pages, entitled "Accounts Payable." *This document* does not state what obligations have been paid or settled.

The repetition of "document" links the two sentences. In the first sentence, the story is about a document. In the second, the opening words keep the reader focused on the subject of the story and assure the reader that the subject is still

the document.

Here is another example:

Sanitary sewer service for the school is provided by a subsurface septic *system*. The disposal field that serves *this system* is located on property owned by the Board of Education.

The reference to the septic system in the second sentence links the second sentence to the first. The reader is reminded that the subject of the story hasn't changed, and the reader experiences continuity.

Good hooks are subtle and transparent; that is, the reader does not realize a hook is being used. Bad hooks, on the other hand, are blatant, like the repetition of a noun where a pronoun works better:

Mr. Jones labors 60 hours a week for the company but is denied a salary. Mr. Jones is nominally an officer and director but has no power.

The second "Mr. Jones" should be "He." Unnecessarily reiterating the name interrupts the flow, creating a sense of starting again rather than continuing. Readers react poorly to the waste of time and space and to the apparent lack of craft.

A variation on the overuse of proper names is the practice of beginning a sentence with the proper name that ended the previous sentence:

ABC Corp. entered into a long-term contract to supply fish to one of the leading producers of canned tuna, XYZ Co. XYZ Co. delivers millions of cans of tuna into this State every year.

Don't repeat "XYZ Co." so quickly. It gives the reader a start, or more accurately, a stop and restart. Consequently, the second sentence doesn't flow easily from the first. The sentences are like dominos laid end-to-end — six-spot to six-spot or four-spot to four-spot.

The immediate repetition of XYZ Co. suggests the writer gave little thought to how to begin the second sentence and merely chose the nearest word, that is, the last word of the previous sentence. The simplistic format is reminiscent of children's writing and suggests that the writer's argument is simplistic and therefore flawed.

True, the repetition of "XYZ Co." from the prior sentences is a hook, but the hook is too obvious. Instead of immediately repeating the name, use a comma and "which":

ABC Corp. entered into a long-term contract to supply tuna to one of the leading producers of canned tuna, XYZ Co., which delivers millions of cans of tuna into this State every year.

In the alternative, mention XYZ Co. in the middle of the first sentence:

ABC Corp. entered into a long-term contract to supply tuna to XYZ Co., one of the leading producers of canned tuna. XYZ Co. delivers millions of cans of tuna into this State every year.

In short, look for ways to echo the subject of a previous sentence, but keep the echo subtle and smooth.

Puzzler

How would you tighten and sharpen the following sentence?

In spite of the strenuous opposition that was raised by the defendants, the Appellate Division granted the motion of the National Association of Franchisees to participate in the appeal in the role of amicus curiae.

Once the trimming is done, this one has a number of adequate solutions, each reflecting a slightly different philosophy.

"Despite" is crisper than "in spite of," and "that was" is unnecessary. With these changes, the opening is reduced to: "Despite strenuous opposition by the defendants..." Arguably, this is better than "Despite defendants' strenuous opposition" (which would be shorter) because the writer should respond quickly to the reader's likely question, "Despite what?" (Answer: despite strenuous opposition).

I prefer to reduce "granted the motion

of" to "permitted" because it is shorter and because it alliterates well with "participate." One can credibly argue, on the other hand, that "granted the motion of" reminds the reader that the Association affirmatively sought the right to be heard.

"In the appeal" and "in the role of" are implicit and therefore unnecessary. Just say "as amicus curiae," which is better than "as a friend of the court" because it connotes formality and shows that you know the lingo.

The second alternate version recognizes that the informal term "amicus" may be enough to convey the thought. This version also provides a quicker answer to the question, "Granted what?"

The revised version:

Despite strenuous opposition by the defendants, the Appellate Division permitted the National Association of Franchisees to participate as amicus curiae.

Alternate version:

Over defendants' strenuous objection, the Appellate Division granted the motion of the National Association of Franchisees to participate as amicus curiae.

Second alternate version:

Over defendants' strenuous objection, the Appellate Division granted amicus status to the National Association of Franchisees. ■