1 Transitions

Transition questions are **the most common type of Writing question**, with some tests containing 8-10 such items—**up to 15-20% of the test**. As a result, you should make sure that you are comfortable working with both common and less common transitional words and phrases. (An extended list is provided on p. 19.)

On the SAT, you must also be able to recognize when transitions do and do not create logical connections between two sentences or parts of a sentence. Usually, these questions contain four grammatically acceptable answers; the focus is on testing your ability to identify the most logical option in context.

Let's start by looking at a typical example. We're going to consider it without the answers for now.

Although T.S. Eliot devoted several years to writing "The Waste Land," it sold only about 330 copies in the six months following its publication in 1922. _____ Eliot was forced to seek other sources of income. In the mid-1920s, he took a job as the director of a new publishing firm called Faber & Faber.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

Ⓐ --------

Ⓑ --------

Ⓒ --------

Ⓓ --------

The fact that the blank begins with a transition tells us that the correct word must indicate the relationship between the sentence with the blank and the previous sentence or portion of the passage.

Before we even look at the answer choices, we must back up and determine how the sentence begun by the blank relates to the information before it.

The first sentence states that Eliot's "The Waste Land" *sold only about 330 copies* in the months after it was published.

The second sentence—the sentence begun by the transition—states that Eliot was forced to search for other sources of income.

Logically, the second statement indicates the **result** of the first statement, so the correct option must convey that relationship.

Now we can look at the full set of answer choices.

Although T.S. Eliot devoted several years to writing "The Waste Land," it sold only about 330 copies in the six months following its publication in 1922. _____ Eliot was forced to seek other sources of income. In the mid-1920s, he took a job as the director of a new publishing firm called Faber & Faber.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

Ⓐ Alternatively,

Ⓑ Consequently,

Ⓒ In fact,

Ⓓ Moreover,

The fastest way to answer this question is to look for the option that conveys a result: *consequently* clearly indicates that the second statement describes a result, i.e., a consequence, of the first, so (B) is a perfect fit.

If we wanted to play process of elimination:

Alternatively is used to indicate a contrasting relationship, so (A) does not fit.

In fact is used to emphasize a preceding statement, so (C) does not fit either.

Moreover means "in addition" or "furthermore" and is used to introduce a new supporting idea. That's not quite what we're looking for here, so (D) can be eliminated as well.

Again, that leaves us with (B).

Notice that we were able to eliminate answers by using the purpose, or function, of each transition. Because we knew beforehand what purpose the correct word had to have, we did not need to take the time to plug each option back into the passage, get distracted by how each one sounded in context, or be tempted by vaguely plausible sounding but not-quite-right options such as (C) and (D).

Types of Transitions

There are three main types of transitions.

1) Continuers indicate that two sentences are expressing similar ideas.

Correct: *Erenna sirena,* a relative of the jellyfish, is one of the rare marine organisms to emit red light. **Indeed,** only a few other deep-sea creatures produce a glow that color.

2) Cause-and-Effect words indicate that one action is the **result** of another.

Correct: The light from most quasars was emitted when the universe was only a fraction of its present age. **Therefore,** quasars offer an important clue to the appearance of the early universe.

3) Contradictors indicate that two sentences are expressing different ideas.

Correct: An increased reliance on computerized systems can leave users vulnerable to cyberattacks. **However,** current defenses are stronger than many people realize.

Continue		Cause and Effect	Contradict
Add Information	**Emphasize**	Accordingly	Alternately
Additionally	In fact	As a result	Alternatively
Also	Indeed	As such	Although/Though
Furthermore	**Compare**	Consequently	By contrast
In addition	Likewise	Fittingly	Conversely
Moreover	Similarly	Hence	Despite/In spite of
Secondly	**Sequence of Events**	Predictably	Even so
Give Example	Earlier	Thus	Even though
For example	Previously	Therefore	However
For instance	Currently	To that end	In any case
Specifically	After		In comparison
Define, Clarify	Subsequently		Instead
Effectively	Finally		Meanwhile
Essentially	While		Nevertheless
In other words	**Conclude**		Nonetheless
In sum	In conclusion		On the contrary
In summary	To conclude		On the other hand
That is			Otherwise
			Rather
			Regardless
			Still
			That said

How to Work Through Transition Questions

As a general rule, **it is crucial to do as much work as you can toward determining the precise relationship between the statements in question before you look at the choices**. If you plug in choices without really knowing what you're looking for, you may be tempted to "twist" options that don't really fit.

1) Reread both sentences or parts of the sentence.

2) Determine the relationship between them, and try to predict the answer.

- Contrast: *however, nevertheless, still, in contrast*
- Add similar idea: *furthermore, moreover, in addition, similarly, likewise*
- Result: *therefore, consequently, accordingly*
- Example: *for example, for instance, specifically*
- Emphasis: *indeed, in fact*

3) Check the answers, and pick the option that matches.

Note: if you are unable to define the precise relationship, you should at least determine the general type of transition you are looking for and see if you can eliminate an answer or two.

- If the sentences express similar ideas, you can eliminate contradictors, e.g., *but* or *however*.
- If they express different ideas, you can eliminate both continuers and cause-and-effect words, e.g., *for example* or *therefore*.

Shortcut: If two or more answers contain grammatically identical synonyms, those answers can be automatically eliminated because no question can have more than one right answer. So, for example, if choice (A) is "consequently" and choice (C) is "therefore," you can immediately eliminate both. Although this technique seems unlikely to apply to many digital exam questions, it may be occasionally useful.

Let's look at an example. Try not to look at the answer choices until you've determined the relationship.

Conditions in the interior of Antarctica are inhospitable to many forms of life: sub-zero temperatures, high winds, and extreme dryness make it impossible for most animals to survive. _____ the Antarctic Peninsula and the surrounding islands have relatively mild temperatures and liquid water, allowing many species to thrive there.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

Ⓐ	Therefore,
Ⓑ	For instance,
Ⓒ	Indeed,
Ⓓ	In contrast,

If you know what type of transition you're looking for upfront, this is a very straightforward question.

- Sentence 1 indicates that life cannot thrive in Antarctica's interior.
- Sentence 2 indicates that life can thrive in the Antarctic Peninsula and islands.

Those are clearly opposing ideas, so a contradictor is required. On that basis alone, (A), (B), and (C) are all continuers, leaving (D), "in contrast," as the only possible answer.

Note: In extremely rare cases, the College Board has asked students to make a very fine distinction between two transitions of the same type. This question type has appeared only once, on a non-administered exam (Test 2, #25 in the 2020 edition of the *Official Guide*), but I am addressing it here to be safe.

Conditions in the interior of Antarctica are inhospitable to many forms of life: sub-zero temperatures, high winds, and extreme dryness make it impossible for most animals to survive. _____ the Antarctic Peninsula and the surrounding islands have relatively mild temperatures and liquid water, allowing many species to thrive there.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

Ⓐ	Still,
Ⓑ	For example,
Ⓒ	However,
Ⓓ	In other words,

While "still" and "however" are usually interchangeable, in this case "however" is a stronger fit. "Still" means "despite this," but the Antarctic Peninsula's milder weather does not exist *despite* the harsher weather in the interior. It is simply a different location with a different climate. (C) is thus correct.

Let's look at another, more challenging example.

Despite the sub-zero temperatures, high winds, and extreme dryness that characterize the Antarctic interior, a small number of hardy species dwell there. _____ certain mosses, lichens, and microscopic protozoa have adapted to the harsh conditions and are able to thrive.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

Ⓐ	In addition,
Ⓑ	Specifically,
Ⓒ	Accordingly,
Ⓓ	Nevertheless,

Don't get distracted by the scientific language and references to mosses and protozoa—remember that you do not need to know anything about the topic to answer the question. Focus on the essential information, and determine the relationship between those ideas.

- Sentence 1: a few species are able to dwell in Antarctica despite its harsh climate.
- Sentence 2: lists specific species able to live there.

Logically, the correct transition must be a continuer signaling that Sentence 2 will present **examples** of the idea introduced in Sentence 1. The only option that matches is (B), "specifically," so it is correct.

Transitions in the Middle or at the End of a Sentence

In the examples we've looked at so far, transitions have appeared at the beginnings of sentences or clauses. In some cases, however, the transition may appear **between two commas** in the middle of a sentence.

Although questions containing this construction may appear to ask about only one sentence, they are actually about the relationship between two sentences: the sentence that contains the underlined transition and the previous sentence(s). Compare:

Version #1: **Therefore**, tropical marine mammals have very few fat reserves in their bodies.

Version #2: Tropical marine mammals, **therefore**, have very few fat reserves in their bodies.

The difference here is purely stylistic—the sentences have **the exact same meaning**, and in both cases the transition serves to connect the sentence to a previous statement. Let's look at how that works in context.

Healthy arctic marine mammals have a thick layer of fat beneath the skin. Tropical marine mammals, _____ have very few fat reserves in their bodies. As a result, many of them dwell primarily in the warm waters that surround coral reefs.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

Ⓐ	therefore,
Ⓑ	likewise,
Ⓒ	however,
Ⓓ	for instance,

To see why the transition can't connect the two halves of the sentence, we can cross it out and consider the information before and after it separately.

1) Tropical marine mammals

2) have very few fat reserves in their bodies

There is no logical relationship between these two statements—they make no sense when read separately.

The transition does, however, serve to clarify the relationship between the sentence in which it appears and the previous sentence. So now we're going to back up and consider those **two** sentences, again crossing out the transition.

1) Healthy arctic marine mammals have a thick layer of fat beneath the skin.

2) Tropical marine mammals~~, therefore,~~ have very few fat reserves in their bodies.

The two sentences express contrasting ideas: a *thick layer* of fat vs. *very few* fat reserves. A contradictor is thus required. "Therefore," "likewise," and "for example" are continuers, leaving (C), "however."

When you are working with **contradictors**, things become slightly more complex in terms of placement.

Unlike continuers, which are generally placed at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence, contradictors can appear at the **beginning** (followed by a comma); **middle** (surrounded by commas); or **end** (following a comma).

To illustrate, let's consider three versions of the sentence below.

1) Healthy arctic marine mammals have a thick layer of fat beneath the skin. **However,** tropical marine mammals have very few fat reserves in their bodies.

2) Healthy arctic marine mammals have a thick layer of fat beneath the skin. Tropical marine mammals**, however,** have very few fat reserves in their bodies.

3) Healthy arctic marine mammals have a thick layer of fat beneath the skin. Tropical marine mammals have very few fat reserves in their bodies**, however**.

All of the sentences have **the exact same meaning**, with *however* serving the same function: to indicate that the second sentence contrasts with the first.

Let's look at how that could play out in a question.

Healthy arctic marine mammals have a thick layer of fat beneath their skin, allowing them to dwell in the frigid waters surrounding the Earth's poles. Tropical marine mammals have few fat reserves in their bodies, _____. As a result, they are largely confined to the warm waters that surround coral reefs.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

Ⓐ	therefore,
Ⓑ	however,
Ⓒ	moreover,
Ⓓ	in fact,

The most important thing to understand is that even though the transition in question is physically located next to the sentence that follows, it is still asking about the relationship between the sentence in which it appears and the previous sentence. Because those sentences present contrasting ideas, (B) is correct.

Note that you may also be asked to work with a transition in the middle of a sentence that is genuinely intended to connect two parts of the same sentence; however, these transitions will follow only **one comma**.

For example, consider this version of the question on the previous page:

Tropical marine mammals have few fat reserves in their bodies and dwell primarily in the warm waters that surround coral reefs. In contrast, healthy arctic marine mammals have a thick layer of fat beneath their skin, _____ they are able to tolerate much colder waters.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

Ⓐ so

Ⓑ for

Ⓒ yet

Ⓓ whereas

This time, we do need to consider the two halves of the sentence in which the transition appears. As always, we start by crossing out the transition.

1) Healthy arctic marine mammals have a **thick layer of fat** beneath their skin.

2) They are able to tolerate cold water.

The second half of the sentence indicates a result of the first, so a cause-and-effect word is required. (C) and (D) are both contradictors and can be eliminated immediately.

Note that in (B), "for" means "because"—it is a cause-and-effect word, but it reverses the ideas: logically, arctic marine mammals do not have a layer of fat beneath their skin because they are able to tolerate cold waters, but rather the opposite.

Only *so* creates the correct cause-and-effect relationship, making (A) correct.

Glossary of Less-Common Transitions

As such – *As a* + noun; because

As such is best explained with an example.

Correct: Dolphins are highly **social animals. Because they are social animals,** they live in pods with up to a dozen members.

To eliminate the repetition, we can replace the phrase *as social animals* with *as such.*

Correct: Dolphins are highly social animals. **As such (= as social animals),** they live in pods with up to a dozen members.

Accordingly	**Therefore, As a result**
Consequently	
Hence	

Correct: Dolphins are highly social animals. **Consequently / Accordingly / Hence,** they live in pods with up to a dozen members.

Fittingly – Appropriately

Correct: A bottlenose is a type of dolphin. **Fittingly,** it is characterized by an elongated snout.

Predictably – Unsurprisingly

Correct: Dolphins may become distracted when socializing or searching for food. **Predictably,** they are more likely to become entangled in fishing nets at those times.

Furthermore	**In addition**
Moreover	

Correct: Dolphins are social animals. **Furthermore / Moreover,** they are highly intelligent.

In fact	**Emphasizes a preceding statement**
Indeed	

Correct: Dolphins are social animals. **In fact/Indeed,** they spend their lives living in pods with up to a dozen members.

That is – In other words; introduces a definition or explanation, and often follows a dash

Correct: Dolphins are mammals—**that is,** they are warm-blooded and nourish their young with milk.

In sum – To summarize; typically introduces a concluding statement

Correct: Dolphins are gifted mimics and quick learners; they also demonstrate self-awareness and are able to solve relatively complex problems as well as teach others. **In sum,** they are highly intelligent creatures.

Meanwhile – Literally, at the same time; can also mean *however* and signal a contrast

Correct: Many people think of dolphins as fish. **Meanwhile,** they ignore scientific research, which long ago established that dolphins are actually mammals.

Subsequently – Afterward, Next

Correct: In the 1980s, dolphin populations began to decline because too many animals were caught in fishing nets. **Subsequently,** fishing companies began taking steps to reassure customers that their products were "dolphin safe."

Nevertheless	**Despite this, However**
Regardless	
Still	
That said	

Correct: Researchers have spent decades studying dolphins' vocalizations, but many aspects of these sounds remain a mystery. **Nevertheless / Regardless / Still / That said,** they hope to eventually obtain a more complete understanding of how the animals communicate.

Exercise: Transitions 1 (answers p. 201)

From the three options, circle the one that correctly indicates the logical relationship between each set of statements. Then, choose the transition that best connects the statements. Remember that the transition always creates the same relationship between them, no matter where it is placed.

1. In the past, coffees were blended to suit a homogenous popular taste. _____ many different coffee flavors are now being produced.

Step 1: Continue Cause-and-Effect Contrast

Step 2:

Ⓐ Accordingly,
Ⓑ Thus,
Ⓒ However,
Ⓓ Alternatively,

2. Researchers are unable to drill into the Earth's core. _____ its chemical composition remains a mystery.

Step 1: Continue Cause-and-Effect Contrast

Step 2:

Ⓐ Indeed,
Ⓑ Consequently,
Ⓒ In comparison,
Ⓓ For example,

3. The Taj Mahal is regarded as one of the eight wonders of the world. _____ some people believe that its architectural beauty has never been surpassed.

Step 1: Continue Cause-and-Effect Contrast

Step 2:

Ⓐ Indeed,
Ⓑ Specifically,
Ⓒ By contrast,
Ⓓ Still,

4. In order to save an endangered species, preservationists must study it in detail. _____ scientific information about some endangered animals is scarce.

Step 1: Continue Cause-and-Effect Contrast

Step 2:

Ⓐ Therefore,
Ⓑ Moreover,
Ⓒ Fittingly,
Ⓓ However,

5. Pyramids are most commonly associated with ancient Egypt. _____ many people are surprised to learn that the Nubians, who lived in modern-day Sudan, constructed a far greater number of pyramids than the Egyptians did.

Step 1: Continue Cause-and-Effect Contrast

Step 2:

Ⓐ Moreover,
Ⓑ Consequently,
Ⓒ Nevertheless,
Ⓓ Likewise,

6. Modern chemistry keeps insects from ravaging crops, removes stains, and saves lives. _____ constant exposure to chemicals is taking a toll on many people's health.

Step 1: Continue Cause-and-Effect Contrast

Step 2:

Ⓐ In sum,
Ⓑ By contrast,
Ⓒ Still, However
Ⓓ Subsequently,

7. Music serves no obvious purpose. It has, _____ played a role in every known civilization on earth.

Step 1: Continue Cause-and-Effect Contrast

Step 2:

Ⓐ therefore,
Ⓑ moreover,
Ⓒ however,
Ⓓ for instance,

8. In the Middle Ages, fairs often attracted large crowds and led to rioting. _____ authorities were reluctant to grant permission for them to be held.

Step 1: Continue Cause-and-Effect Contrast

Step 2:

Ⓐ Alternatively,
Ⓑ For instance,
Ⓒ Furthermore,
Ⓓ As such,

9. Although the abstract painter Joan Mitchell disliked being compared to Monet, the parallels between them were undeniable. Her terrace overlooked a house that Monet occupied from 1878 to 1881, as well as a landscape that he painted. _____ some of her own late works unmistakably hark back to the paintings that Monet produced in his twilight years at Giverny.

Step 1: Continue Cause-and-Effect Contrast

Step 2:

Ⓐ Moreover,
Ⓑ Thus,
Ⓒ Meanwhile,
Ⓓ Nevertheless,

10. A recent study suggests that consuming food late in the evening has profound effects on the hunger-regulating hormones leptin and ghrelin, which influence our drive to eat. _____ researchers found that levels of the hormone leptin, which signals satiety, remained low for 24 hours for a group of subjects instructed to eat dinner late, whereas leptin levels were much higher in a group that ate dinner early.

Step 1: Continue Cause-and-Effect Contrast

Step 2:

Ⓐ Consequently,
Ⓑ However,
Ⓒ Specifically,
Ⓓ Therefore,

Exercise: Transitions 2 (answers p. 201)

Circle the transition that correctly indicates the logical relationship between each set of statements. Remember that the transition always connects a sentence to the previous information, no matter where it is placed.

1. Rather than embrace the type of abstract work that many artists of her generation preferred, Gwendolyn Knight preferred to depict figures in a spontaneous and personal manner. _____ she painted oil portraits of friends as well as studies of dancers in motion.

Ⓐ Moreover,
Ⓑ Specifically,
Ⓒ Nevertheless,
Ⓓ Besides,

2. Straw has been used as a building material for centuries, and contrary to popular belief, it is not easily destroyed. _____ it can be remarkably durable. In the nineteenth century, settlers in the Nebraska Sand Hills used straw to build houses when wood and clay were scarce; some of the structures are still standing today.

Ⓐ Therefore,
Ⓑ Even so,
Ⓒ However,
Ⓓ In fact,

3. While doing fieldwork on Gorgonilla Island in Colombia in 2014, Hermann Bermúdez found spherule deposits—layers of sediment filled with tiny glass beads. These beads formed when the heat and pressure from an asteroid impact melted and scattered the crust of the Earth, ejecting tiny liquid blobs into the atmosphere. _____ they fell back to Earth in solid form under the influence of gravity.

Ⓐ Therefore,
Ⓑ Meanwhile,
Ⓒ Subsequently,
Ⓓ Additionally,

4. Blue whales recognize when the wind is changing their habitat and identify places where ocean currents produce large aggregations of krill. The tiny shrimp are the primary food source for the massive animals, which can weigh 165 tons or more. _____ their ability to locate these dense concentrations of nutrients is a matter of survival.

Ⓐ Consequently,
Ⓑ For instance,
Ⓒ Furthermore,
Ⓓ Alternatively,

5. In 1959, Project Mercury became the first human spaceflight program led by NASA. Aimed at putting an American into orbit before the Soviet Union could accomplish that goal, it was shut down after less than half a decade. _____ in the four years of its existence, seven astronauts were able to travel into space.

- Ⓐ For instance,
- Ⓑ Still,
- Ⓒ Accordingly,
- Ⓓ Indeed,

6. Bacteria have one or many appendages known as a flagellum, which is made of thousands of identical subunits. _____ a tail that was straight or only slightly flexible would leave an organism unable to move, bacteria have evolved rotating, corkscrew-shaped propellers that push them forward. Scientists call the formation of this shape "supercoiling," and now, after more than half a century, they understand how the process works.

- Ⓐ Although
- Ⓑ Despite
- Ⓒ Because
- Ⓓ Unless

7. Although Shakespeare portrayed King Richard III as a villain, historians argue that he was in fact a far more sympathetic figure. The Tudors, on whose patronage Shakespeare was dependent, had conquered the English throne from Richard. _____ the playwright was obliged to portray the king in an unflattering light.

- Ⓐ Hence,
- Ⓑ Still,
- Ⓒ In contrast,
- Ⓓ Moreover,

8. Trade on the Silk Road was a significant factor in the development of China, India, and Europe, opening long-distance political and economic interactions. _____ silk was certainly the major trade item from China, numerous other types of goods, including textiles, cloth, and pottery, also traveled along the Silk Road.

- Ⓐ Because
- Ⓑ Although
- Ⓒ Until
- Ⓓ When

9. From the moment *2001: A Space Odyssey* premiered in 1968, it was clear that the film would become best known for its special effects. It featured spacecraft that flew realistically—not zooming around in a cartoonish manner, as was the case in other films of the time. _____ Kubrick imagined a fully realized vision of regular human spaceflights in Earth orbit and beyond.

Ⓐ	Moreover,
Ⓑ	Nevertheless,
Ⓒ	To illustrate,
Ⓓ	Meanwhile,

10. Discarded electronic devices such as cell phones and tablets are a rapidly growing source of waste, but there are some potential solutions. One way to mitigate the problem, _____ could be to include components made with renewable resources.

Ⓐ	therefore,
Ⓑ	moreover,
Ⓒ	otherwise,
Ⓓ	for instance,