

Flow

If a piece flows smoothly, its material and design cohere seamlessly, and your voice comes across as clear and natural.

You might need to develop your piece's flow if...

- You read the piece, and it feels choppy or disjointed.
- You are unsure how the components of your piece fit together.
- Your piece jumps from one idea to the next with no transitions in between.
- The piece uses the same sentence structure repeatedly, without variation.
- Aspects of the piece are a bit confusing.

Guiding Questions:

- How does each paragraph or section speak to your intention of the piece?
- How are the paragraphs or sentences in this piece connected to one another? Do they flow together in a way that the reader will understand?
- How are you transitioning across ideas in this piece?



Overview


Reading your piece out loud can reveal areas to improve flow. You might consider how your transitions link one sentence to the next, or how the broader ideas of each paragraph connect to one another.



Strategy 1: Read-Aloud

How to Use Read-Aloud

- Focus on transitions between paragraphs and sentences. Are you using words or phrases that clearly demonstrate how your ideas relate to one another?
- If your piece sounds choppy, consider varying your sentence structure (e.g., simple, compound, complex, compound-complex, short) and length.
- If your sentences sound confusing when you read them aloud, ensure they have a parallel structure, which can make sentences easier and cleaner to read and understand.
- Consider using a large language model (LLM) AI tool like ChatGPT to give you different ways to word the same sentence or ideas for how to transition from one idea to the next.



Strategy 2: Says/Does Outline

Overview

A says/does outline allows you to examine what a sentence or paragraph says (its content) and does (its purpose or intention) within the entire piece, which shows you how seamlessly your ideas fit together.

How to Use a Says/Does Outline

- Read through each paragraph of your piece. On the left side of it, write down what you believe to be its main point. On the right side of it, write down what you believe it does for your entire piece (e.g., introduces your main argument, urges your reader to consider a new viewpoint, persuades your reader to feel a certain way about your character). Once you have finished the exercise, think about ways you may re-arrange your paragraphs to make points flow more naturally.
- If you would like to focus more on sentence-to-sentence flow, complete this same exercise but for one paragraph in your piece. What is the main point of each sentence? What does each sentence serve in the grander scheme of your paragraph? What adjustments (e.g., rearrangements, transitions, additional sentences) might you need to make so your sentences flow more naturally?
- Make this exercise more fun and visual using annotation tools! You may consider printing out your piece and writing out what each paragraph or sentences says/does using brightly colored markers or sticky notes.
- You can also use a digital tool like Zotero or Canva and annotate using virtual sticky notes.
- If you would like to collaborate with a coach or instructor on this exercise, consider using a shared tool like Google Drive. You may also use simple note-taking tools like OneNote or Evernote and forego annotating the piece itself.