

COHESION

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Cohesion, or coherence, is the intangible glue that holds paragraphs together. Having good coherence in a writing project means that your ideas stick together and flow smoothly from one sentence to the next, so that readers of your work can easily understand where you are taking them. Without cohesion, a written work can seem choppy and may not flow well; a lack of coherence challenges the reader and can hurt comprehension, thus rendering your attempt at communication ineffective at best.

We will look at cohesion within paragraphs, but the basics below, along with organizational devices like headings, help to link sentences, paragraphs and sections coherently in longer, complex writing projects.

Here are four main components of cohesion:

- relevance
- order
- linking words
- repetition of key words

1. RELEVANCE

A simple way to build cohesion or flow between sentences is to look at the meaning of a sentence and compare it to the point of the next sentence. They should be related yet not the same. If the two sentences are not closely related, you will lose the readers' attention, because they will have to guess where you are going. If the two sentences are identical, you are not adding any new information to your work, and the reader will be annoyed.

Example – Too different: relevance not clear

Antigone's motivation is family duty, even if it means death. **She must rebel which will cause an uproar - the consequences don't matter to her. This would also explain why she rejects Ismene's support later in the play.** They both have different motivations - Ismene has nothing left to lose and wants to go out with a glorious bang.

In this paragraph, two sentences are far too separate. The first two sentences talk about Antigone's motivations and how far they will drive her. The focus is then redirected to Ismene, and the paragraph focus is not clear. It lacks cohesion.

When a sentence relates the Ismene information back to Antigone, we have cohesion:

Antigone's motivation is family duty, even if it means death. She wants to rebel which will cause an uproar - the consequences don't matter to her. **In**

contrast, her sister, Ismene, has completely different motivations for her actions and wants glory, which explains why Antigone rejects her support later in the play.

Example – Too similar

Aristophanes exaggerates Socrates' intelligence in a humorous way.
Aristophanes portrays Socrates' intelligence as a tool of humor. He makes Socrates use his intelligence to make a mockery of people.
Aristophanes makes Socrates appear very brash in the use of his intelligence.

The author conveys only two points with these four sentences – that Aristophanes uses Socrates' intelligence as a joke, and that he did so by having Socrates mock people. Cutting away the unnecessary repetitions strengthens cohesion:

Aristophanes exaggerates Socrates' intelligence in a humorous way.
The playwright makes Socrates use his intelligence to make a mockery of people, being very brash in the process.

2. ORDER

Writers should always ask themselves “Is this sentence relevant to the idea of this paragraph?” Every paragraph should have a main idea (typically stated in a topic sentence). To maintain cohesion, all sentences within a paragraph should relate to this main idea. For example, if you are writing a paragraph on why nuclear power plants are an efficient, clean way of generating energy, it may seem out of place to then reflect on why a duck's quack does not echo and the resulting societal implications. More often than not, these sentences **are** important to your paper, but need to be moved elsewhere: in a separate paragraph or just relocated within the same paragraph so the sentences order is logical.

Common ways to order sentences

- Chronological
- Cause and Effect
- Clarification (first sentence is broad, general statement, and the following sentences explain it with details)
- Compare/Contrast

Example – Chronology is unclear

Then there was another meeting with Satan, who said if Job's body was tested Job would sin against God. **The three friends Eliphaz of Teman, Zophar of Naamah, and Bildad the Shuah came to try and console Job.**
The three saw then that Job was stricken with disease and his

suffering was very great.

Chronological order and time signals improve cohesiveness:

There was another meeting with Satan, who said if Job's body was tested Job would then sin against God. **When Job was later stricken with disease and suffering greatly, his three friends, Eliphaz of Teman, Zophar of Naamah and Bildad the Shuah, tried to console him.**

Example – Cause and effect:

These sentences start with an action that is the result of an earlier event. Flow is not smooth because without links or logic, the reader has to do a little bit of mental rearranging:

The detective tried to gather more evidence by going to the store to ask Mr. McDougal what he knew about the murder. He did this because when he had asked the Davidson's maid what she saw at the scene of the crime, she mentioned McDougal.

Ordering these sentences by cause and effect, i.e. chronologically, creates:

The detective talked to the Davidson's maid and asked her what she saw at the scene of the crime. She mentioned the local store owner, Mr. McDougal, so the detective then visited McDougal to gather more evidence.

3. LINKING/TRANSITION WORDS

Transition words can help a paragraph flow more smoothly.

The following two sentences are far apart, in fact, opposites in content and unconnected in time.

Example: As one can see, early in the history of the United States, most pollution was created without regard to the environment. **Different private groups have taken steps towards preserving nature, including conservationists and environmentalists.**

A transition word, "however," announces the contrasting relationship for the reader, avoiding the stop and start rollercoaster effect and creating cohesion. "Today" moves the reader from "early history."

As one can see, early in the history of the United States, most pollution was created without regard to the environment. **However,** different private groups **today** have taken steps towards preserving nature, including conservationists and environmentalists.

For cohesion within and between paragraphs –

The transition words and phrases below are an abbreviated list of transition terms found at : <http://www.studygs.net/wrtstr6.htm>. Find more help at <http://larae.net/write/transition.html>

Addition: also, again, besides, furthermore, in addition, likewise, moreover, as well as

Result: thus, therefore, as a result, consequently, for this reason, hence, otherwise, subsequently

Generalizations: typically, as usual, for the most part, generally, usually, in general

Introducing Examples: for example, for instance, as an illustration, as an example, in this case

Emphasis: above all, chiefly, especially, particularly, significantly, most importantly, primarily

Similarity: comparatively, correspondingly, likewise, similar, together with, combined with

Exception: aside from, barring, besides, except, excluding, exclusive of, other than, outside of

Restatement: in essence, in other words, namely, that is, in short, to put it differently

Contrast /Compare: in contrast, conversely, instead, on the other hand, on the contrary, rather, similarly, yet, but, however, still, nevertheless, in contrast, comparatively, likewise

Order (time): at first, to begin with, at the same time, now, the next step, in turn, later on, meanwhile, next, then, soon, later, while, earlier, simultaneously, afterward, before, prior, last, meanwhile

Summary: in brief, in conclusion, in short, in summary, in the final analysis, finally

4. REPETITION OF KEY WORDS

Repeating key terms related to the main idea of the paragraph makes an invisible rope for readers to follow – a few hand holds. However, do not repeat words for the sake of repetition; the reader needs to occasionally be reminded of your focus, not beaten over the head with unnecessary repetitions.

Example: The following paragraph focuses on the negative impact of the recession on restaurants. Follow the key words, variations of “economy,” “restaurant,” and “weak”; they tie sentences together as each negative effect is added to the paragraph:

Many problems in the **economy** are impacting the **restaurant industry**. The factor responsible for most of these negative impacts is the **economic recession**. Due to **weak economic** conditions, the U.S. food service industry revenues will only rise 2.5% in 2008, compared to the 4.6% increase in 2007; the National

Restaurant Association reports this to be among the **poorest** sales performances by the domestic **restaurant industry** in nearly four decades (Basham, 2008b). In response to the **weak economic** conditions, **restaurants** are increasing prices only enough to offset higher costs, rather than to expand profit margins (Basham, 2008b). Also, unemployment in the United States affects **restaurants** with rates reaching 5.3% in 2008 compared to 4.6% in 2007 (Basham, 2008b). The government has also made cost **difficult for restaurants** by increasing the federal minimum wage to \$7.25 in 2009 (Basham, 2008b). Finally, consumers are traveling less which is lowering **restaurant sales**; travelers and visitors accounted for a median of 15% of sales at quick service restaurants. At this time, the **weak economic** conditions have had a major impact on the **food service industry**.

Repetition of the blue key words links the negative impacts on revenues, prices, employment, labor costs and customer traffic in the restaurant industry.

Note also the transition words and phrases: “due to,” “in response,” “also,” “finally.”

To avoid needless repetition:

As you read each sentence, you naturally expect the next sentence to relate directly to the previous sentence. And this sentence does relate because I am still talking about your, the reader’s, expectation. But what happens if I don’t follow-up on the preceding one? I would break your reader attention. In a cohesive paragraph, every sentence builds on the information in the previous sentence, so that you avoid creating a bumpy wooden roller-coaster ride for your reader.

If the subjects of two sentences are the same, typically a pronoun can be used to refer to the subject.

Example:

As you Like It was a universal play that, when set in modern times, still makes sense and can capture an audience. **The play *As you Like It*** uses modern costumes, props, and interactions with the audience to relate the story to our times.

Note how the repetition of the full name of the play makes the beginning of the second sentence awkward. With a pronoun, it reads

As you Like It was a universal play that, when set in modern times, still makes sense and can capture an audience. **It** uses modern costumes, props, and interactions with the audience to relate the story to our times.

Warning: Be sure the reader will know what “it,” “he,” “that,” and other pronouns mean. See http://www.clarkson.edu/writingcenter/docs/vague_pronouns.pdf

Finally...

5. REREAD & REVISE!

The best way to improve cohesion is to thoroughly reread your paragraphs. Many times, writers quickly put down all of their thoughts in a stream of consciousness. While everything that they write makes sense at the time, it may seem like a garbled mess to a reader. Rereading your work (or having a friend, professor or tutor read it) allows you to add any missing links, fill gaps in logic and create cohesion.

Additional Resources:

http://www.ecu.edu/first_year_studio/workshops/printable_ws/Organization_and_Cohesion.doc

<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/style/cohesion.html>

<http://papyr.com/hypertextbooks/comp1/coherent.htm>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/561/04/>

<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/style/transitioncues.html>