

PRINCIPLES OF ACADEMIC WRITING III: COHESION STRATEGIES

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Introduction

Cohesion is the presence in writing of linguistic links or internal connections between different parts of the text. Cohesion strategies relate to, for example, *conjunctions* and *transition words or phrases* which indicate the relationship between ideas or information presented in the text. Cohesion also includes grammar, as different points of grammar indicate different relationships between ideas and information in much the same way that conjunctions and transition words and phrases do. In this sense, **cohesion** refers to linguistic properties. **Coherence** is somewhat different in that it is a cognitive property. Coherence relates to the internal logic of the document; for example whether or not the ideas that have been presented are done so in a logical sequence. This workshop principally looks at cohesion.

Both cohesion and coherence are important in academic writing as they make life easier for the reader by ensuring they can navigate through the text easily, absorbing the ideas that are being presented without having to work too hard. At the beginning of your article you will stress the novelty, significance, impact and relevance of your work and this will entice the reader. As they journey further into the text, however, the challenge to keep them reading increases. Williams Zinsser, in his book *On Writing Well* (2006, 7th Edition) suggests that "... The reader is an impatient bird, perched on the thin edge of distraction or sleep" (p.24-25). In other words, it is easy to lose your reader if they have to struggle to follow the "narrative" that you are presenting in the text; if the twists and turns, changes in discussion and mood are not properly signaled then they will easily become confused and stop reading.

Achieving cohesion in academic writing

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are the linking words used inside sentences to link clauses. There are two types of conjunctions; the first are coordinating conjunctions which are used in compound sentences to link to independent clauses. Coordinating conjunctions include the following words: *for, and, nor, but, or and yet*. Here is a way to remember these: FANBOY (For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet).

Coordinating conjunctions are used within sentences to indicate relationships between ideas. Specifically, they are used to indicate changes of mood in compound sentences, those sentences which consist of two independent clauses. For example:

‘In a matriarchy, the mother is the head of the family **and** all the children belong to her extended family group’.

‘Children need love, **but** they also need discipline’.

The second type of conjunction is a subordinator. Again, subordinators are linking words within a sentence, but this time they are used in the context of complex sentences. Complex sentences are those comprised of an independent clause (or a simple sentence) and one or dependent clauses. The list of subordinators is long and includes words such as *although, however, because, since, if, whereas, unless, until*. Subordinators can also take the form of phrases and not just single words, for instance: *even if, even though, in order that, provided that*.

‘**Although** the company sales increase last year, its net profit declined’.

‘Recently both trade figures and the economy have improved, **however**, the specter of an interest rate rise has the potential to slow any future growth’.

Transition words and phrases

Transition words, like conjunctions, are also linking words which indicate the logic flow in the passage of text. The difference is that transition words are used to link a sentence to the one that preceded it. Transition words therefore are linking words between, rather than within, sentences. Many rightists in fact use them interchangeably, and to some degree this is acceptable, although it can be a source of confusion. I think one of the ways to reduce this confusion is to consider the appropriateness of using a particular linking word *at the beginning of a sentence* to indicate a shift in information or ideas relative to the previous sentence. For instance, the transition words *moreover*, *furthermore* (both of which are called intensifiers), *consequently*, *accordingly*, *similarly*, *nevertheless*, *likewise*, and *thus* can all be used at the beginning of a sentence. They signal to the reader some sort of change and idea.\

‘**Moreover**, those who get the highest grades are more likely to gain a first class honours and with that qualification entry into the PhD program’.

‘**Consequently**, more women than men have entered the profession of nursing since the turn of the 20th century’.

Linking words are one of the most critical means to ensuring cohesion in your text. It is useful to have a good transition word chart handy as a writing resource so that you can use the most appropriate linking word, and also a variety of linking words.

SEE TRANSITION WORD CHART OR VISIT:

<http://www.readingrockets.org/content/pdfs/transition%20words.pdf>

The use of predictive statements



Predictive statements are a little bit different than conjunctions and transition words and phrases in that they perform a reader orientation function by *signposting* the main topics or points of discussion that will be revealed in the text. Principally they indicate the sequence in which they will be presented. The most efficient way to do this is to use a series of *predictive statements* that assist the reader to understand the content and organisation of the information that is to follow. For example:

Initially, I examine.... This is followed by a review of.....A discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of X is then presented. The fourth section provides an analysis of ... Finally I draw out recommendations for....

By doing this, you are telling the reader that you are not randomly carving up information, but presenting it as a sequence of logical and coherent steps – or interconnected ideas - which took you from A to Z. (One way of testing the structural integrity of your work is to type a sequential list of your main ideas as you intend to present them. When you have done this, consider their ordering; as they are placed do they contribute to the development of a logical, coherent argument or could this be improved by rearranging the ideas into a new order).

Examples of major signposts in thesis writing:

- *The aim of this study is to*
- *The purpose of this thesis is to....*
- *This essay argues that*
- *The main questions addressed in this paper are*
- *This essay critically examines....*
- *The above discussion raises some interesting questions.*
- *This paper begins by It will then go on to Finally,*
- *This chapter reviews the literature*
- *In conclusion,*

Examples of linking words and phrases:

- **Listing:**
first(ly), ... / second(ly), ... / finally, ... /
- **Indicating addition or similarity:**
also, ... / besides, ... / in addition, ... / furthermore, ... / as well / similarly, ...
- **Indicating contrast:**
however, ... / nevertheless, ... / on the other hand, ... /
- **Giving a reason:**
for this reason, ... / because ... / because of .../ due to ...
- **Indicating result or consequence:**
therefore, ... / thus, ... / as a result, ... / consequently, ...
- **Reformulating an idea:**
in other words, ... / to put it simply, ... / that is ...
- **Exemplifying:**
for example, ... / for instance, ... / to exemplify, ...

Exercise: rewrite the following paragraph so that it reveals a logical progression or sequence of ideas through the use of predictive statements. Feel free to consult the transition word chart!

Incorporation offers several advantages to businesses and their owners. Ownership is easy to transfer and the business is able to maintain a continuous existence even when the original owners are no longer involved. The stockholders of a corporation are not held responsible for the business's bad debts. If the corporation defaults on a \$1 million loan, its investors will not be held responsible for paying that liability. Incorporation enables a business to obtain professional managers with centralised authority; the business can be run more efficiently. Incorporation gives a business certain legal rights. It can enter into contracts, own property, and borrow money.

Repetition

Repetition is something that writers often try to avoid, and in some sense this can be correct. There is no point in repeating the same piece of information several times for no good reason. Some repetition, however, can be beneficial in helping the reader to feel secure as they navigate through the text. For instance, it is helpful to maintain precise and consistent usage for key terms and key concepts. Many academic writers resist using the same key term over and over again because they feel the reader will “get bored”. They look for synonyms which they can use interchangeably to provide the same meaning as the keyword. So for instance rather than use the term “the villagers” an author might use “the locals”, “the residents”, “the inhabitants”. Yet in doing so the reader is left to wonder whether, in the context of the work, all these mean the same thing. The same practice can be applied to concepts such as “identity”. Synonyms might include “the self”, “subjectivity”, or “self-image”. The reader will always feel more secure if you maintain consistent use of key concepts and terms in your writing (secure in the sense that they know precisely what you are referring to). Variety can be better achieved through the use of different transition words and phrases.

SEE HANDOUT RELATING TO LEAP YEAR CUSTOM

Examine one or two pages of your own text. Investigate and then describe the way that you have used the following:	
Coordinating conjunctions	
Subordinators	
Transition words and phrases	
Key concepts and terms	




Cohesion Strategies

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Coherence & Cohesion

- Coherence relates to the internal logic of the whole document
 - Cohesion refers to the linguistic properties and internal connections that indicate the connection between ideas
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Conjunctions

- Conjunctions are the linking words used inside sentences to link clauses.
- There are two types –
- **coordinating conjunctions** which are used in compound sentences to link independent clauses. They include *for, and, nor, but, or* and *yet..*
- **Subordinators** are used as linking words within complex sentences. There are many subordinators, they include words like *although, however, because, since, if* *whereas, unless, until*. Subordinators can also take the form of a phrase – *even if, even though, in order that...*





Transition Words and Phrases

- ▶ Are linking words that are used at the beginning of a sentence. They indicate the relationship between sentences rather than the ideas within sentences.
- ▶ Moreover.....
- ▶ Consequently.....
- ▶ In contrast.....
- ▶ As a result.....
- ▶ Similarly.....



Predictive Statements

- ▶ Are a lot like linking words but indicate to the reader the sequence of the information that will be given to them. For instance:
- ▶ First(ly)..../second(ly)...../thirdly.....
- ▶ Initially.....This is followed by.....Finally.....

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- Incorporation offers **four** advantages to businesses and their owners. **The first** is that ownership is easily transferred, allowing the business to maintain a continuous existence even without the original owners. **The second advantage** is that the stockholders of a corporation are not held responsible for the business' bad debts. **For example** if the corporation defaults on a loan its investors won't be responsible. **The third advantage** of incorporation is that it enables a business to obtain professional managers with centralized authority **so that** the business can be run more effectively. **Finally**, it gives a business certain legal rights, **such as** it being able to enter in to contracts, own property and borrow money. (112 words)



Repetition

- There is good and bad reputation
- Good repetition includes re-establishment of argument (to remind the reader of the fact that all the information you present in your paper is there to support it)
- And it includes consistent use of key terms, key nouns and key concepts.

A Leap Year Custom Lives On

ALL SENTENCES ARE
RELATED TO THE TOPIC.

KEY NOUNS ARE REPEATED,
AND SYNONYMS ARE USED.

PRONOUNS ARE
CONSISTENT.

TRANSITION SIGNALS HELP
THE READER FOLLOW THE
PROGRESSION OF IDEAS.

IDEAS ARE PRESENTED IN
LOGICAL ORDER.

No one knows for certain the origin of the custom that allows women to propose marriage on Leap Day. Leap Day is February 29th, the extra day added every four years to put the calendar year in synch with the solar year. One explanation for the custom comes from Ireland. According to Irish legend, Saint Brigid, an Irish holy woman who lived in the fifth century, complained to Saint Patrick about women having to wait for men to propose. Saint Patrick agreed that this practice was unfair, so he decided that eager females could propose on this one day. A different explanation of the custom comes from medieval England. According to this explanation, people there thought that because Leap Day existed to fix a problem in the calendar, it could also be used to fix an old and unjust practice. In 1288, the custom became an actual law in Scotland. Not only did the Scottish law allow women to propose on any day during a Leap Year, but it also said that any man who declined a woman proposal had to pay a fine! Whatever its origins, the tradition of women taking the initiative one day a year lives on in Sadie Hawkins Day celebrations held in many communities in the United States even today.



Participant Exercise

