

Flow and Cohesion: Developing Readability

These slides will introduce you to ways you can develop cohesion in a text you are writing:

- **Within sentences** (e.g., focus, parallelism)
- **Between sentences** (e.g., adverbial links)
- **In paragraphs** (e.g., topic sentences, paragraph structure)

Focus & Sentence Organization

Compare the three versions (A-C) of the following sentence. Note how information that is placed at the beginning or end of a sentence is more strongly emphasised, whereas information in the middle is de-emphasised.

- A. **Education** remains the most important single means of economic advancement, in spite of its shortcomings.
- B. In spite of its shortcomings, **education** remains the most important single means of economic advancement.
- C. **Education** remains, in spite of its shortcomings, the most important single means of economic advancement.

Decide in each case what the focus of the sentence is, and in what circumstances a writer would use that word order.

Parallelism

Read the following sentence from the introduction of a journal article in which the three aims of the study are presented:

“The aims of the study were to evaluate the nutritional status of the hospitalised elderly patients, to estimate the prevalence and distribution of malnutrition among them and to value the correlation of the Mini Nutritional Assessment (MNA) with nutritional biochemical and anthropometric parameters.”

(Nutr Hosp. Jul-Aug 2005;20(4):286-92).

Note how the verb form of the three aims is identical (...*to X*). This is known as parallelism, and gives the reader a sense that the three aims belong together. We tend to notice more when parallelism is lacking from a sentence, as you will see on the next slide.

Parallelism

Take the two examples below in turn. Discuss in your group where the parallelism is lacking in each case and what changes you would make to the verb forms to develop **parallel structures**. Is there more than one way to fix the sentences? If so, which alternative would you choose and why?

1. The purpose of the project was **developing** alternative methods, **evaluating** their applicability and **to optimize** the methods for use in the laboratory.

2. The next stages of the study included **collecting** samples, **analysing** metal concentrations and statistical **analysis**.

Flow

Sentences in a text do not exist in isolation, but are connected to other sentences that precede and follow them. A good approach to learn about the ways to connect sentences is to look for examples in the texts you use as information sources.

As an example exercise, read the text on the following slide and, together in your group, find and underline or highlight words or phrases that link sentences. Consider what sorts of **relationships** these linking words and phrases create.

Lasers have found widespread application in medicine. For example, they play an important role in the treatment of eye disease and the prevention of blindness. The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery because most of the tissue is transparent. Because of this transparency, the frequency and focus of the laser beam can be adjusted according to the absorption of the tissue so that the beam “cuts” inside the eye with minimal damage to the surrounding tissue – even the tissue between the laser and the incision. Lasers are also more effective than other methods in treating some causes of blindness. However, the interaction between laser light and eye tissue is not fully understood.

(Source: Swales & Feak (1994) *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*)

Once you have found as many linking words as phrases as you can, compare your findings with the following slides.

Note how the text opens with a sentence that appears to introduce the topic of the text that follows, what is sometimes referred to as a “topic sentence”:

“Lasers have found widespread application in medicine. For example, they play...”

Note how many of the sentences that follow open with an introductory word, phrase or clause that links back to the sentence before and is followed by a comma:

Lasers have found widespread application in medicine. For example, they play an important role in the treatment of eye disease and the prevention of blindness. The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery because most of the tissue is transparent. Because of this transparency, the frequency and focus of the laser beam can be adjusted according to the absorption of the tissue so that the beam “cuts” inside the eye with minimal damage to the surrounding tissue – even the tissue between the laser and the incision. Lasers are also more effective than other methods in treating some causes of blindness. However, the interaction between laser light and eye tissue is not fully understood.

One sentence uses the adverb “also” as a sentence connector. However, being an adverb in this sentence, it is not at the beginning but placed alongside the verb it modifies:

Because of this transparency, the frequency and focus of the laser beam can be adjusted according to the absorption of the tissue so that the beam “cuts” inside the eye with minimal damage to the surrounding tissue – even the tissue between the laser and the incision. Lasers are also more effective than other methods in treating some causes of blindness.

Early in the text, one sentence ends on a topic that logically connects with the opening of the following sentence, although no sentence connector is used:

Lasers have found widespread application in medicine. For example, they play an important role in the treatment of eye disease and the prevention of blindness. The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery because most of the tissue is transparent.

Finally, note that sentence connectors are not only used to link separate sentences, but can also connect independent information *within* a sentence:

Because of this transparency, the frequency and focus of the laser beam can be adjusted **according to** the absorption of the tissue **so that** the beam “cuts” inside the eye with minimal damage to the surrounding tissue – **even** the tissue between the laser and the incision.

Examples of linking words /phrases

Swales & Feak (1994)

	Subordinators	Sentence Connectors	Phrase Linkers
Addition		Furthermore, in addition, moreover	In addition to
Adversative	Although, even though, despite the fact that	However, nevertheless	Despite, in spite of
Cause and Effect	Because, since	Therefore, as a result, consequently, hence, thus	Because of, due to, as a result of
Clarification		In other words, that is, i.e.	
Contrast	While, whereas	In contrast, however, on the other hand, conversely	unlike
Illustration		For example, for instance	
Intensification		On the contrary, as a matter of fact, in fact	

Logical Links & Transitional Words

The following exercise gets you to think about the **types of relationship** that can be created with different logical links and transitional words. More specifically, you will look for the following types of relationship:

1. **Contrast** and **comparison**
 2. **General** and **specific**
 3. **Sequence of time**
 4. **Enumerated sequence (Firstly, ... Secondly, ... Thirdly, ...)**, and
 5. **Cause** and **effect**.
- Study the following passages (A-F). What is the relationship between the sentences in each passage?
 - Which words (if any) indicate the relationship?
 - Can you identify any further relationships between independent parts *within* the sentences?

- A. Coal is transported from the mine to the power station by rail. After arrival, it is stored in bunkers and then, when required, fed into large furnaces where it is burnt.
- B. During the 1950s, the expanding industries of the north required large numbers of unskilled workers. As a result, many migrant workers arrived from the economically depressed southern provinces in search of work and improved living standards.
- C. Draining of swamp land is an important factor in the fight against malaria. The drainage of the Pontine marshes in the 1930s virtually eliminated the incidence of the disease.

- D. Coal-fired power stations are relatively safe but emit large amounts of carbon dioxide and other polluting agents into the atmosphere. Nuclear-generated power, on the other hand, is clean, but can, if things go wrong, lead to disastrous consequences.
- E. The government's decision to close the unprofitable Liverpool car plant had two effects on the economy of the city. First, 3000 people were made redundant, creating personal hardship and a severe strain on the social services. Secondly, many of the skilled workers left the area in search of work elsewhere, creating a serious shortage of skilled manpower.
- F. In the 1940s, farmers were encouraged to use DDT and artificial fertilizers to eliminate pests, enhance soil fertility and hence increase crop yields. In the 1960s, it became apparent that the use of chemicals in a culture was causing serious damage to soils, plant and human life, and this led to the banning of DDT in many countries and the search for more environmentally friendly fertilizers.

This + summary word

Another way to maintain flow is to use **this/these + a noun** to join ideas together. We have already seen an example of this in the laser text:

“The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery because most of the tissue is transparent. **Because of this transparency**, the frequency and focus of the laser beam can be adjusted according...”

Consider the following examples:

- ESL lecturers know that students need to understand the differences between formal and informal language. However, **this understanding** cannot usually be acquired quickly.
→ What does **this understanding** refer to?
- In recent years, the number of students applying to Ph.D. programs has remained constant. **This situation** has resulted in intense competition for admission.
→ What does **this situation** refer to? What is the effect of using **this** instead of **that**?
- These phrases *summarize* what has already been said.

Complete the following:

It is very important to use a summary word that accurately describes the pattern, trend or information in the preceding sentence.

In the two examples below, you are provided some alternative summary words. In your group, discuss which words are inappropriate. Among those that are left, which one would you use?

1. According to a recent survey, 26% of all American adults, down from 38% thirty years ago, now smoke. This _____ (*decline, reduction, improvement, decrease, drop*) can be partly attributed to the mounting evidence linking smoking and fatal diseases, such as cancer.
2. Early in September each year, the population of Ann Arbor, Michigan, suddenly increases by about 20,000 as students arrive for the new academic year. This _____ (*influx, increase, invasion, rise, jump*) changes the character of the town in a number of ways.

Exercise in joining sentences

For each of the examples below, try in your group to join the short sentences together to make a single sentence:

1. She had a sore throat. She had spoken for three hours.
2. He came out of the conference room. Reporters surrounded him.
They had some questions. He answered the questions.
3. She ate too little. She worked too hard for weeks on end. She became ill. She had to stay home.
4. His mother waited up. She was worried. He came home. It was late.

From sentences to paragraphs

- When writing a text, a writer eventually reaches some kind of transition and marks this with a break in the text.
- The new sentences continue after the break until the next transition occurs, when another break is inserted.
- As the writing process continues, these isolated ‘packages’ of sentences form what we call ‘paragraphs’.

What is a paragraph?

(<http://www.kanten.com/styleguide/book/parag.html>)

“A paragraph is one or more sentences focusing on a single subtopic or idea that serves as a visual signal, helping readers to see divisions within the larger whole. Without paragraphs, texts would be harder to read.”

A paragraph is **one single information unit** that extends or clarifies the idea presented by a topic sentence. It consists of one or more complete sentences.

How long should a paragraph be?

- No specific length: depends upon the paragraph topic.
- Typically 2-5 sentences, less than 150 words in academic and technical texts. (1/3 – 1/5 of a page)
- An emphatic paragraph may consist of a single sentence: used to state a position or point. Explanatory paragraphs that follow tend to be longer.

(<http://www.kanten.com/styleguide/book/parag.html>)

When to begin new paragraphs

Begin a new paragraph	Combine paragraphs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">To mark off the introduction and the conclusionTo signal a shift to a new ideaTo indicate an important shift in time/placeTo emphasize a pointTo highlight a contrastTo signal a change in speakersTo provide readers with a needed pauseTo break up text that looks too dense.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">To clarify the essay's organizationTo connect closely related ideasTo bind text together if it looks too choppy.

What is a good way to organize a paragraph?

(<http://www.kanten.com/styleguide/book/parag.html> & Diana Hacker (1999) *A Writer's Reference*: p. 36)

Open the paragraph with a thesis or topic sentence, which presents the main point of the paragraph (a one-sentence summary of what to expect) or **the general direction of the discussion**. The point should be clear; all sentences must relate to it. Sometimes it follows a transitional sentence linking the paragraph to earlier material, and occasionally it is withheld until the end of the paragraph.

Develop the main point! Though an occasional short paragraph is fine, particularly if it functions as a transition or emphasizes a point, a series of brief paragraphs suggests inadequate development. You may need to define, explain, indicate distinctions, give examples, details, etc.

Employ a clear organizational scheme. The following sentence(s) logically carry forth the discussion: chronological, whole-part, general-specific, problem-solution, cause-effect, more-less important. So, choose a suitable pattern of organization; remember logical sequentiality: examples & illustrations, narration, description, process, comparison & contrast, analogy, cause & effect, classification & division, definition

Example exercise:

In the paragraph on the following slide, can you find examples of:

- repeated or restated terms,
- pronouns,
- links between sentences and
- parallel structures that contribute to the development of cohesion?

The ancient Egyptians were masters of preserving dead people's bodies by making mummies of them. Basically, mummification consisted of removing the internal organs, applying natural preservatives inside and out, and then wrapping the body in layers of bandages. And the process was remarkably effective. Indeed, mummies several thousand years old have been discovered nearly intact. Their skin, hair, teeth, finger- and toenails, and facial features are still evident. Their diseases in life, such as smallpox, arthritis, and nutritional deficiencies, are still diagnosable. Even their fatal afflictions are still apparent: a middle-aged king died from a blow on the head; a child king died from polio. (Michael Rosenbaum, *Lost Arts of the Egyptians*)

How can an effective flow of information be achieved among paragraphs in a document?

(<http://www.kanten.com/styleguide/book/parag.html>)

Achieving a good flow of information requires a smooth transition between paragraphs. These transitions may be accomplished by:

- Previewing the content, i.e., using an **opening paragraph** to list the topics to be discussed in later paragraphs. This sets up a natural topic progression for subsequent paragraphs.
- Using **key words** to connect the closing sentence of a paragraph to the opening sentence of the next one.
- Using **headings** or **numbering systems** to indicate the **transition** from one topic to the next.