HELLENIC REPUBLIC
UNIVERSITY OF CRETE

Academic English

Section 3: Coherence – Cohesion in Writing

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Achieving Coherence

- You can make your paragraphs more coherent <u>by ordering their support according to basic organizational patterns.</u> Three common patterns are <u>time order, space order, and order of importance.</u>

- <u>Time order</u> (or chronological order) means simply that the supporting elements in a paragraph are arranged in <u>the order in which they occurred</u> or in which the reader would expect them to occur.

- In paragraphs ordered by<u> time</u>, you must be sure that your supporting points consistently follow a <u>chronological sequence</u> and that <u>no important point is left out.</u>

Achieving Coherence

- In paragraphs ordered by <u>space</u> the writer organizes the support in the paragraph <u>according to a spatial arrangement or pattern.</u> Space order enables a reader to <u>visualize what is being described.</u>

- <u>Space order and time order</u> are <u>not mutually exclusive</u>. The supports in a paragraph can be ordered by both space and time.

- Ordering the supports in a paragraph according to their <u>relative importance</u> is another way to make your paragraphs coherent. Order of importance is probably <u>used more often</u> than any other principle in the arranging of supports within a paragraph.

- When you write your paragraph order your supports <u>from the least to the most important</u>. Fill in secondary supports as needed.

Examples

Example of a Paragraph Written in Chronological Order

Potato Chips in Close Proximity
by student at Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill, CA

I become disgusted when I'm exposed to people with atrocious manners. I'm sickened when they lick their fingers as they eat. I think it's repulsive when they chew with their mouths open, and I become irritated when they use their teeth to open packages of food. Recently, I went to a movie theater with my family and some friends. **Just before the movie started, the** friend next to me decided that it was the perfect time to devour a large bag of greasy potato chips. **At first**, she wrestled to open the bag. She tried pinching and pulling and finally tore it open with her teeth. The bag burst and the top portion of the chips flew everywhere, including on my lap. **Every time** she stuck her fingers into the bag to get a chip, the bag crackled. Her teeth crunched loudly on each chip and her mouth hung open for everyone to see. **As she finished the bag**, she licked her fingers. **Next** she held up her hand to let it dry and I saw her saliva glistening in the lights of the room. Unsightly! Needless to say, when she offered to shake hands with me **at the end of the night,** I avoided them and gave her a hug.

Examples

- <u>Example of a Paragraph Written in Order of Importance</u>

Exercise Has Many Benefits
by student at Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill, CA

   Do you need motivation to exercise? Here are some effects of exercise that can benefit your life. Exercise can be—gasp—fun! If you are wondering what to do on a Sunday afternoon, go out and find a hiking trail and take the family on a hike. Exercise can add spark to your sex life because it leaves you feeling energized and looking better, which also can stimulate your sex drive. Are you tired of looking like a house? Well, exercise can help you manage your weight. Get outside and shed those unwanted pounds. Aerobic activity also can improve your mood. Maybe you need to blow off some steam. A workout or a 30 minute walk can promote euphoria and calm you down because it stimulates various brain chemicals. Exercise also reduces insomnia, a condition that thwarts concentration and productivity. In addition, cardio activity has been proven to lower cholesterol and high blood pressure, and can decrease the risk of colon and breast cancer. **Most importantly**, keeping fit combats chronic diseases and premature death.

Examples

Example of a Paragraph Written in Order of Space

My trailer's main room is paneled with artificial walnut planks, and the low, fiberglass tiled ceiling is stained with water marks. A linoleum floor separates the kitchen area from the carpeted living room, which is furnished with a worn gold velvet sofa and two matching easy chairs that face a low table bearing the scuff marks of a now absent television set. Two of the walls are lined with windows, and the other supports a large, ornamental carpet picturing a family of polar bears occupying an ice flow. My bedroom, like that of my potential roommate's, is cell-like in both its size and simplicity, furnished with only a bed and a small chest of drawers that easily accommodates the little I brought with me.

Achieving Coherence

- <u>Transitional devices</u> add coherence to a paragraph by linking the ideas in a sentence with those in the next. <u>They remind the reader of what preceded and signal what is to follow.</u>

- When used effectively, transitional words and phrases can make the difference between a <u>clearly written and easy-to-read paragraph</u> and one which is difficult to follow because it moves abruptly from sentence to sentence.

- When selecting transitional words and phrases for your paragraphs, be sure <u>to select only those that fit logically</u> and to use only <u>as many as are needed</u> to make your paragraph coherent.

Achieving Coherence

- Pronouns add coherence to a paragraph in two ways: they smooth the flow of the sentences by eliminating awkward repetition of nouns, and they help to knit a paragraph together by referring to nouns in previous or following sentences or sentence parts.

- Use pronouns only when they are needed, be sure that every pronoun has a clear antecedent and be certain that every pronoun agrees with its antecedent in person, number and, if possible, gender.

- To maintain focus on the controlling idea throughout a paragraph, writers often repeat key words and phrases that emphasize this idea.

Achieving Coherence

- <u>Repetition of key words and phrases</u> adds coherence to a paragraph by drawing the reader's attention to the controlling idea of the paragraph.

- <u>By combining brief, simple sentences, in longer, more developed sentences</u>, you can render your paragraph more coherent and less choppy.

- Longer, more developed sentences establish more clearly the relationships among the facts and ideas in your sentences by <u>emphasizing important points and subordinating less important points.</u>

- Do not, however, think that a paragraph is coherent only when its sentences are long and complicated: <u>sentence length should reflect the relationships among the ideas being presented.</u>

- There are <u>three major tenses in English: present, past and future.</u>

Achieving Coherence

- If you begin writing in one tense, <u>stick to that tense</u> throughout your paragraph unless a given context logically requires the use of a different tense.

- Illogical and unnecessary shifts in verb tense within a paragraph disrupt the flow of ideas and detract from the paragraph's coherence.

- Another way to ensure that your paragraphs are coherent is <u>to maintain consistency in the person of the pronouns</u> that you use.

- <u>Person depends on the tone</u> you wish to adopt in a paragraph. <u>First-person pronouns are informal and personal; third-person pronouns are more distant and objective.</u> Most expository paragraphs are written in the third-person.

Achieving Coherence

- In expository writing <u>the pronoun *you* is used less frequently</u> than first- and third–person pronouns and is reserved primarily for instances where <u>the writer is speaking to a clearly defined audience.</u>

- Remain consistent to the person of the pronouns throughout the paragraph. <u>Mixing the persons of the pronouns</u> in a single paragraph, unless there is a clear-cut reason for doing so, <u>results in awkward shifts in the perspective</u> which can destroy the coherence of the paragraph.

- Avoid using<u> the indefinite *you*</u> because <u>it creates vagueness</u> and <u>an overly casual tone.</u>

Coherence in Writing

- Coherence is product of many different factors, which combine to make every paragraph, every sentence, and every phrase contribute to the meaning of the whole piece. Coherence in writing is much more difficult to sustain than coherent speech simply because writers have no nonverbal clues to inform them if their message is clear or not. Therefore, writers must make their patterns of coherence much more explicit and much more carefully planned. Coherence itself is the product of two factors — <u>paragraph unity and sentence cohesion.</u>

Paragraph Unity

- To achieve paragraph unity, a writer must ensure two things only. First, the paragraph must have a single generalization that serves as the focus of attention, that is, a topic sentence. Secondly, a writer must control the content of every other sentence in the paragraph's body such that (a) it contains more specific information than the topic sentence and (b) it maintains the same focus of attention as the topic sentence.

- This generalization about paragraph structure holds true for the essay in particular. The two major exceptions to this formula for paragraph unity are found in fiction (where paragraph boundaries serve other functions, such as indicating when a new speaker is talking in a story) and in journalism (where paragraphs are especially short to promote 'visual' ease by creating white space).

Sentence Cohesion

To achieve cohesion, the link of one sentence to the next, consider the following techniques:

- **Repetition.** In sentence B (the second of any two sentences), repeat a word from sentence A.
- **Synonymy.** If direct repetition is too obvious, use a synonym of the word you wish to repeat. This strategy is call 'elegant variation.'
- **Antonymy.** Using the 'opposite' word, an antonym, can also create sentence cohesion, since in language antonyms actually share more elements of meaning than you might imagine.
- **Pro-forms.** Use a pronoun, pro-verb, or another pro-form to make explicit reference back to a form mentioned earlier.
- **Collocation.** Use a commonly paired or expected or highly probable word to connect one sentence to another.

Sentence Cohesion

- **Enumeration.** Use overt markers of sequence to highlight the connection between ideas. This system has many advantages: (a) it can link ideas that are otherwise completely unconnected, (b) it looks formal and distinctive, and (c) it promotes a second method of sentence cohesion.
- **Parallelism.** Repeat a sentence structure. This technique is the oldest, most overlooked, but probably the most elegant method of creating cohesion.
- **Transitions.** Use a conjunction or conjunctive adverb to link sentences with particular logical relationships.

Identity. Indicates sameness (that is, that is to say, in other words, …)

Opposition. Indicates a contrast. (but, yet, however, nevertheless, still, though, although, whereas, in contrast, rather, …)

Sentence Cohesion

Addition. Indicates continuation. (and, too, also, furthermore, moreover, in addition, besides, in the same way, again, another, similarly, a similar, the same, …)

Cause and effect. (therefore, so, consequently, as a consequence, thus, as a result, hence, it follows that, because, since, for, …)

Indefinites. Indicates a logical connection of an unspecified type. (in fact, indeed, now, …)

Concession. Indicates a willingness to consider the other side. (admittedly, I admit, true, I grant, of course, naturally, some believe, some people believe, it has been claimed that, once it was believed, there are those who would say, …)

Exemplification. Indicates a shift from a more general or abstract idea to a more specific or concrete idea. (for example, for instance, after all, an illustration of, even, indeed, in fact, it is true, of course, specifically, to be specific, that is, to illustrate, truly, …)

Examples

- **Repetition of a Key Term or Phrase**

Example:

*The problem with **contemporary art** is that it is not easily understood by most people. **Contemporary art** is deliberately abstract, and that means it leaves the viewer wondering what she is looking at.*

- **Synonyms**

Example:

***Myths** narrate sacred histories and explain sacred origins. These **traditional narratives** are, in short, a set of beliefs that are a very real force in the lives of the people who tell them.*

- **Pronouns**

Example:

*When **scientific experiments** do not work out as expected, **they** are often considered failures until some other scientist tries them again. Those that work out better the second time around are the ones that promise the most rewards.*

Examples

- **Transitional Words**

Example:

*I like autumn, **and yet** autumn is a sad time of the year, too. The leaves turn bright shades of red and the weather is mild, **but** I can't help thinking ahead to the winter and the ice storms that will surely blow through here. **In addition**, that will be the season of chapped faces, too many layers of clothes to put on, and days when I'll have to shovel heaps of snow from my car's windshield.*

Parallel Structure

- Parallel structure means using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. This can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level. The usual way to join parallel structures is with the use of coordinating conjunctions such as "and" or "or."

Words and Phrases

- **With the –ing form (gerund) of words:**

Parallel:

Mary likes hiking, swimming, and bicycling.

- **With infinitive phrases:**

Parallel:

Mary likes to hike, to swim, and to ride a bicycle.
OR
Mary likes to hike, swim, and ride a bicycle.

(Note: You can use "to" before all the verbs in a sentence or only before the first one.)

Words and Phrases

Do not mix forms.

- **Example 1**

  Not Parallel:
  Mary likes hiking, swimming, and to ride a bicycle.

  Parallel:
  Mary likes hiking, swimming, and riding a bicycle.

- **Example 2**

  Not Parallel:
  The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and in a detailed manner.

  Parallel:
  The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and thoroughly.

Clauses

- A parallel structure that begins with clauses must keep on with clauses. Changing to another pattern or changing the voice of the verb (from active to passive or vice versa) will break the parallelism.

- **Example 1**

  Not Parallel:
  The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, that they should not eat too much, and to do some warm-up exercises before the game.

  Parallel:
  The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, that they should not eat too much, and that they should do some warm-up exercises before the game.

  — or —

   Parallel:
  The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, not eat too much, and do some warm-up exercises before the game.

Lists After a Colon

Be sure to keep all the elements in a list in the same form.

Example 1

Not Parallel:
The dictionary can be used to find these: word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings, and looking up irregular verbs.

Parallel:
The dictionary can be used to find these: word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings, and irregular verbs.

Examples

- **Below is a paragraph revised for coherence.** *Italics* **indicates pronouns and repeated/restated key words, bold indicates transitional tag-words, and** <u>underlining</u> **indicates parallel structures.**

  The ancient Egyptians were masters of preserving dead people's bodies by making mummies of them. **In short***, 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, fingernails and toenails, and facial features* <u>are **still** evident.</u> *Their diseases in life, such as smallpox, arthritis, and nutritional deficiencies,* <u>are **still** diagnosable.</u> **Even** *their fatal afflictions* <u>are **still** apparent</u>*: a middle-aged king died from a blow on the head; a child king died from polio.*

Coherence-Cohesion Example

I couldn't seem to find the right room [the topic sentence: all other sentences in this paragraph support this idea of confusion and disorientation] — none of *them [pronoun referring to "room"] had the number designated on my pass. *First [enumeration], *I [pronoun] wound up at the Department of Verification, *then [enumeration & transition of addition] the Department of Misinformation, *then [enumeration & transition of addition] some clerk from the Pressure Section advised me to try level eight, *but [transition of contrast] on level eight they ignored me, *and [transition of addition] later *I [pronoun] got stuck in a crowd of military personnel — the corridors rang with *their [pronoun referring back to *military] vigorous *marching back and forth, the *slamming of doors, the *clicking of heels [parallelism], *and [transition of addition] over that martial noise, *I [pronoun] could hear the distant music of bells, the tinkling of metals.

Coherence-Cohesion Example

Now and then janitors *would go [setting up parallelism in the verb phrases] by with steaming percolators, *now and then [repetition] *I [pronoun] *would stumble [parallelism] into rest rooms where secretaries hastily renewed their make-up, *now and then [repetition] agents disguised as elevator men *would strike up [end of the parallelism in the verb phrases] conversations — *one of them [pronouns referring to "agents"] had an artificial leg *and [transition of addition] *he took *me [pronouns] from floor to floor so many times that after a while *he [pronoun] began waving to me from a distance and even stopped photographing me with the camera-carnation in his lapel. By noon *we were buddies, *and [transition of addition] *he [pronoun] showed *me his [pronouns] pride and joy, a tape recorder under the *elevator [repetition] floor. *But [transition of contrast] *I [pronoun] was getting more and more depressed and couldn't share *his [pronoun] enthusiasm.

Suggested Sources for practice

- http://www.urch.com/forums/ielts/124158-ielts-writing-exercise-coherence-cohesion.html

- http://grammar.about.com/od/developingparagraphs/a/cohrevisepars1.htm

- http://www.tedpower.co.uk/esl1216.html

Mini Quiz

Select the sentence that illustrates the use of proper parallel construction.

1. Phuong Tran has wit, charm, and she has an extremely pleasant personality.
Phuong Tran has wit, charm, and a pleasing personality.
2. In English class, Tashonda learned to read poems critically and to appreciate good prose.
In English class, Tashonda learned to read poems critically and she appreciated good prose.
3. Raoul's QPA is higher than Ralph.

    Raoul's QPA is higher than Ralph's.
4. He wanted three things out of college: to learn a skill, to make good friends, and to

    learn about life.
He wanted three things out of college: to learn a skill, to make good friends,

    and learning about life.

Sources

- https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/623/1/

- http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/parallelism.htm

- A. Franklin Parks, James A. Lavernier, Ida Masters Hollowell, ; 'Structuring Paragraphs; A guide to Effective Writing', 1986, St. Martin's Press, Inc, New York.

- http://www.flyingwords.com/paragraph-organizationpatterns.html

- http://grammar.about.com/od/shortpassagesforanalysis/a/vowellplace07.htm

- http://home.ku.edu.tr/~doregan/Writing/Cohesion.html

End of Section

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