

Study Skills: Cohesion – Part One

Video transcript

Have you ever been told that your writing lacks flow, that it's disjointed, or repetitive, or hard to follow? That means you need to improve your cohesion. When you read the grading criteria in your units, you may see the word 'cohesive'. If your writing is cohesive, it's easy to read. The text flows like a river. It's your responsibility as a writer to guide your reader through your text. You do this by using cohesive techniques. This video will introduce you to six different ways you can make sure that your writing has good cohesion. You need to use clear paragraph structure, to use parallel sentences, to place old information before new, to repeat key terms, to use the word this with a noun and, finally, to guide your reader using clear signpost language.

Let's start with paragraphing. How do paragraphs help with cohesion? It's important to remember that the purpose of paragraphs is to help our readers. How do they do that? A paragraph is a group of sentences about one idea. So, our readers only need to understand one idea at a time. Clear paragraph structure helps create clear cohesion. One common structure for paragraphs is known as TEEL.

T means topic sentence. These are very important. Remember that the topic sentence should introduce the main idea and link it back to the thesis statement or outline in the introduction.

E means explanation, elaboration, evidence or example.

L means link to the next paragraph or maybe a conclusion. If you want to revise paragraph structure further, visit paragraphs in the study skills page.

The second technique is using parallel structure in our sentences. To do this, we use the same grammar structure — or the same pattern of words — to express ideas that are in a list or are performing the same function.

What does that mean?

Well, here's an example: The Learning Advisor helped me with planning, drafting and how to edit my essay.

Planning and drafting a parallel. They use the same structure. However, how to edit is not parallel. It makes the sentence seem clunky and clumsy. If we replace how to edit with editing, the sentence has better flow. It is more cohesive.

The third technique is placing old before new information in our sentences.

Consider how we read a text: as our eye moves along the sentence, our brain processes the information that it's receiving and predicts what's coming next.

Look at these two sentences:

All students must learn to become good academic writers. So, academic writing is taught in library workshops.

When we see the words academic writers, our brains predict we will read more about this.

In the second sentence, the first words are academic writing. This is old or familiar information. Our brain is seeing what it expects to see, which makes reading quicker and easier.

Now what if we change the second sentence?

All students must learn to become good academic writers. The library offers workshops for practice.

The second sentence begins with 'the library' which is new information, so our brain is not seeing what it expects to see.

This won't stop your reader; however, putting new information early in the sentence interrupts the flow. In a short, simple example like this, it may not matter much but in your longer essays, constantly placing new information early in a sentence can affect your cohesion.

Okay, so far we've looked at the first three strategies for bringing more cohesion into your writing. Stop here and reflect on what you've learned. In part two, we'll look at three more strategies.

Don't forget to speak to a Language and Learning Advisor if you need more help.