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Humanities Writing Centre (HWC)

An Initiative of the Unit for Academic Literacy

Cohesion and Coherence

Cohesion and coherence are important aspects of the structure of academic writing as they have an influence on the readability and logical flow of the argument of a text.

Cohesion refers to the logical flow and connection in a written text and is achieved through the use of devices to link sentences together so that there is a logical flow between ideas from one sentence to the next. Coherence refers to the unity or togetherness of the text as a whole and is achieved through the effective grouping and arrangement of ideas in a logical order.

In academic writing paragraphs are essential to the structure of the text. Information and ideas are sorted into paragraphs to make the writing more logical and to ensure that the argument flows and develops logically. To achieve cohesion and coherence paragraphs and sentences need to be clearly linked to each other to logically and linguistically form a whole. Every paragraph needs a focus or a theme and all parts of the paragraph must contribute to this (Enquist & Oates 2009: 34).

Paragraphs generally follow a typical structure: The first sentence in the paragraph is the **topic sentence**. This sentence defines the scope of the paragraph, encapsulates or organises the paragraph and relates to the thesis of the text. The topic sentence is usually followed by **supporting evidence** for the claims made in the paragraph and an **elaboration** on the claims. It is important to draw the reader's attention to the point you want to make with your claims.

Cohesion in Paragraphs

Cohesion in paragraphs can be achieved by the use of linking devices and logical connectors to link sentences. These devices include a variety of elements, e.g. conjunctions, the use of pronouns and the repetition of certain words. It is important to note that conjunctions link on a grammatical level, while linking devices link meaning.

There is a wide variety of words that can be used to make a logical connection between concepts and sentences. It is important to use them correctly and not overuse certain linking phrases.

Logical connectors			
Additive words <i>add information to what has already been given</i>		Order words <i>used to identify a specific sequence or order of events</i>	
also and as well as at the same time besides equally important	further furthermore in addition likewise moreover too	afterwards at the same time before first(ly), second(ly).. formerly last(ly) later meanwhile next	presently subsequently now then ultimately until while historically today
Amplification words <i>expand upon previous ideas</i>		Summarising words <i>identifies the main line for argument</i>	
as for example for instance in fact	specifically such as that is to illustrate	in conclusion to summarise to sum up in summary	briefly in brief in short
Repetitive words <i>used to repeat something with more emphasis</i>		Qualifying words <i>introduce conditions</i>	
again in other words	that is to repeat	although if	providing unless
Contract and change words <i>used to introduce a contrasting argument</i>		Cause and effect words <i>used to link ideas of casualty and consequence</i>	
but notwithstanding on the other hand even though however in contrast	conversely despite still though whereas yet	accordingly as a result because consequently for this reason	since so then therefore thus
Emphasising words <i>used to highlight important information</i>			
more/most significantly more/most importantly	above all		

Remarks on Cohesion:

- Make sure the text reads like a unit
- Use linking devices and logical connectors
- Be careful not to overuse certain linking phrases
- Make use of pronouns, especially 'this' for linking.
E.g. *Global Warming is caused by man-made or anthropogenic causes. **This** has been fiercely debated.*

Coherence in Academic Writing

Paragraphs have to be coherent. This means that the parts of your paragraph need to link to each other in a logical way so that the reader may easily follow the development of your ideas and argument.

"I have defined *incoherence* as writing in which separate, unrelated ideas appear to be juxtaposed: *they are next to, but not connected to each other ... coherence* exists in a sequence of *words, sentences* and *paragraphs* in which the reader can perceive *connections*... To produce a coherent stretch of discourse, writers use basic thought patterns, or logical patterns, in both simple and complex ways." (Brostoff, 1981).

All parts of the text have to relate to each other in the context in which it appears and there has to be effective transition from one part or idea to the next. Coherence ensures that the 'bigger picture' is clear.

Coherence in writing can be achieved through the use of words, but also through context. Kies (2003) offers the following advice:

"Coherence is a 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 if their message is clear or not. Therefore, *writers must make their patterns of coherence more explicit and much more carefully planned*. Coherence itself is the product of two factors – paragraph unity and sentence cohesion."

Remarks on Coherence:

- Ensure that your arguments are logically structured and arranged
- Develop arguments logically using paragraphs
- Be sure to have a clear introduction, body and conclusion
- Make sure every part of the text fits together
- Ensure that every new paragraph is related to the previous one
- Plan the flow and development of your argument before you start writing
- Ensure that paragraphs are conceptually linked, and not only sentences

Bibliography

Brostoff, A. 1981. *Coherence: 'next to' is not 'connected to'*. *College Composition and Communication*, 32: 278-294.

Enquist, A. & Oates, L.C. 2009. *Just Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Style for the Legal Writer*. New York: Aspen.

Kies, D. 2003. *Coherence in Writing*. *The HyperTextBooks* [Online]. Available: <http://papyr.com/hypertextbooks/engl101/coherent.htm> [2014, February 17].