“Does this make sense?!"

Creating cohesion and coherence in your text

Academic Support Centre 2015
Revision
Readers have conscious & unconscious expectations
Adapted from Hoel (2001) and Hillocks (1987).
Coherence (the pieces make a whole)

Cohesion (two pieces fit together)
Coherence

“...is an experience we create for ourselves as we make our own sense of what we read” (Williams 199).

Global level: “a sense of the whole;” understanding of what all sentences/paragraphs/sections add up to.

Local level: a clear sense of what an individual paragraph or an individual sentence communicates.
Coherence

Sayner, Wisconsin, is the snowmobile capital of the world. The buzzing of snowmobile engines fills the air, and their tank-like tracks crisscross the snow. The snow reminds me of Mom’s mashed potatoes, covered with furrows I would draw with my fork. Her mashed potatoes usually make me sick—that’s why I play with them. I like to make a hole in the middle of the potatoes and fill it with melted butter. This behavior has been the subject of long chats between me and my analyst.
Coherence

Why this passage is incoherent:

1. The subjects of the sentences are entirely unrelated

2. The sentences share no common themes or ideas

3. The paragraph has no one sentence that states what the whole passage supports or explains.
Global Coherence

1. Your readers much **know where one section stops and the next begins**.

2. Readers must recognize a **short segment that introduces** each section and subsection.

3. At the end of that introductory segment, readers look for a **sentence that states the point of the section**, a statement that you expand on in the rest of the unit.

4. Toward the end of that point sentence, they must see **words that express the concepts that you develop** in the rest of that unit.
Global Coherence: there’s a point

Start every major unit of a text with a well-formulated statement that includes the point and introduces the rest of that unit.
Thirty sixth-grade students wrote essays that were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of eight weeks of training to distinguish fact from opinion. That ability is an important aspect of making sound arguments of any kind. In an essay written before instruction began, the writers failed almost completely to distinguish fact from opinion, but did so inconsistently. In three more essays, they distinguished fact from opinion more consistently, but never achieved the predicted level of performance. In a final essay written six months after instruction ended, they did no better than they did in the pre-instruction period, but it was inconsistent, and six months after instruction it had no measurable effect.
Thirty sixth-grade students wrote essays that were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of eight weeks of training to distinguish fact from opinion. That ability is an important aspect of making sound arguments of any kind. In an essay written before instruction began, the writers failed almost completely to distinguish fact from opinion, **but did so inconsistently**. In three more essays, they distinguished fact from opinion more consistently, but **never achieved the predicted level of performance**. In a final essay written six months after instruction ended, they did no better than they did in the pre-instruction period, but it was inconsistent, and **six months after instruction it had no measurable effect**.
In this study, thirty sixth-grade students were taught to distinguish fact from opinion. They did so during the instruction period, but the effect was inconsistent, less than predicted, and six months after instruction ended, the instruction had no measurable effect. In an essay written before instruction began, the writers failed almost completely to distinguish fact from opinion. In an essay written after four weeks of instruction, the students visibly attempted to distinguish fact from opinion, but did so inconsistently. In three more essays, they distinguished fact from opinion more consistently, but never achieved the predicted level of performance. In a final essay written six months after instruction ended, they did no better than they did in their pre-instruction essay. We thus conclude that short-term training to distinguish fact from opinion has no consistent or long-term effect.
The point....

• Put the “point sentence” at the end of the opening segment...it should be the last thing the reader reads before starting the longer, more complex segment that follows.
  – Short passage: just one opening sentence. Key concepts at the end of the sentence.
  – Long passage: perhaps a whole paragraph as the opening, or even several paragraphs. Point sentence should still be at the end, no matter how many paragraphs before we get into the main segment.
In Russia, the Siberian silk moth is an important disturbance factor and since it is migrating into new areas further west and north it may become a larger problem. Insects in the European Russia do not seem to be such of a problem as in Siberia (Shorohova et al., 2009). In North America, insects are an important disturbance factor but there are regional differences. The only province experiencing severe attack from mountain pine beetle is British Columbia, but its range is projected to expand. Spruce budworm is present over all of Canada. In Fennoscandia the European spruce bark beetle is the most important insect, but it has so far not shown the same severe damage to large regions as the outbreaks of mountain pine beetle in Canada.
In the case of insects, the differences between the regions that are most evident are the insect species present. In Russia, the Siberian silk moth is an important disturbance factor and since it is migrating into new areas further west and north it may become a larger problem. Insects in the European Russia do not seem to be such of a problem as in Siberia (Shorohova et al., 2009). In North America, insects are an important disturbance factor but there are regional differences. The only province experiencing severe attack from mountain pine beetle is British Columbia, but its range is projected to expand. Spruce budworm is present over all of Canada. In Fennoscandia the European spruce bark beetle is the most important insect, but it has so far not shown the same severe damage to large regions as the outbreaks of mountain pine beetle in Canada.

From A. Lindegren’s Bsc thesis (2011)
Choose the point sentence to introduce this paragraph....
The problems began in 1722, when Peter the Great passed a law of succession that terminated the principle of heredity and required the sovereign to appoint a successor. But because many tsars, including Peter, died before they named successors, those who aspired to rule had no authority by appointment, and so their succession was often disputed by lower-level aristocrats. There was turmoil even when successors were appointed.
A. The political situation changed, because disputes over succession to the throne plagued seven of the eight reigns of the Romanov line after Peter the Great.

B. The political situation changed, because after Peter the Great seven of the eight reigns of the Romanov line were plagued by turmoil over disputed succession to the throne.
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Global Coherence: Everything is relevant

Readers must see how everything in a section of whole is relevant to its point:
What is relevant?

- Background or context
- Main-claim or sub-claims of a section
- Reasons supporting a claim
- Evidence, facts or data supporting a reason
- An explanation of reasoning or methods
- Consideration of other points of view
We analyzed essays written by sixth-grade students to determine the effectiveness of training in distinguishing fact from opinion. In an essay written before training, the students failed almost completely to distinguish fact and opinion. These essays were also badly organized in several ways. In the first two essays after training began, the students attempted to distinguish fact from opinion, but did so inconsistently. They also produced fewer spelling and punctuation errors. In the essays four through seven, they distinguished fact from opinion more consistently, but in their final essay, written six months after completion of instruction, they did no better than they did on their first essay. Their last essay was significantly longer than their first one, however. Their training thus had some effect on their writing during the training period, but it was inconsistent and transient.
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Global coherence: There’s an order

Readers must see how the parts of your document are ordered:

Remember! The finished product’s order might not be the order your encountered the information or the order you wrote the information.
Order

• Chronological
• Simple to complex
• More familiar to less familiar
• Less contestable to more contestable
• More important to less important (or vice versa)
• Earlier understanding to prepare for later understanding
• General analysis followed by specific applications
Local Coherence
Local Coherence

Consistent ideas toward the beginnings of sentences, especially in their subjects, help readers understand what a passage is generally about. A sense of coherence arises when a sequence of topics comprises a narrow set of related ideas. But the context of each sentence is lost by seemingly random shifts of topics. Unfocused, even disorganized paragraphs result when that happens.
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Consistent ideas toward the beginnings of sentences, especially in their subjects;
Readers;
A sense of coherence;
a sequence of topics;
the context of each sentence;
Unfocused, even disorganized paragraphs;
that
Readers understand what a passage is generally about when they see consistent ideas toward the beginnings of sentences, especially in their subjects. They feel a passage is coherent when they read a sequence of topics that focuses on a narrow set of related ideas. But when topics seem to shift randomly, readers lose the context of each sentence. When that happens, they feel they are reading paragraphs that are unfocused and even disorganized.
When you start to draft or revise a new section of your text, note the names of the characters you want to write about. They should usually be “real doers,” but also important concepts that you will discuss. As you draft or revise, try to put these characters into the subject position of your sentences. If you write several sentences without mentioning these characters, you may have gotten off track.
Local Coherence

Readers expect the grammatical subject of the sentence to be its topic

- It is impossible for your claim to be proved.
- In regard to this question, I believe more research is needed.
- It is likely that our proposal will be accepted.
Local Coherence

Readers expect the grammatical subject of the sentence to be its topic

*It* is impossible for *your claim* to be proved.

In regard to *this question*, *I* believe more research is needed.

*It* is likely that *our proposal* will be accepted.
Local Coherence

Readers expect the grammatical subject of the sentence to be its topic

*Your claim* cannot be proved.

*This question* needs more research (to be answered).

*Our proposal* will likely be accepted.
Local Coherence...fix this!

Readers expect the grammatical subject of the sentence to be its topic

Looking at their future residential intentions, it can be seen that 43.8% of them are very likely to move in the coming five years.
Local Coherence

When starting sentences, avoid “throat-clearing” that pushes the topic/subject further away.

And therefore,
it is important to note that,
in Eastern states since 1980,
acid rain has become a serious problem.
Local Coherence

When starting sentences, avoid “throat-clearing” that pushes the topic/subject further away.

Since 1980, therefore, acid rain has become a political problem in the Eastern states.
Local Coherence...fix this!

When starting sentences, avoid “throat-clearing” that pushes the topic/subject further away

As regards the perceived limitations of urban living, out of the list of variables, the great majority of them don’t apply in the case of the City of Geneva.
Cohesion
Cohesion

“a sense of flow;” well-connected sentences, largely dependent on how one ends and the next one begins.
Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists studying black holes in space. The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole. So much matter compressed into so little volume changes the fabric of space around it in puzzling ways.
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A. The quality of our air and even the climate of the world depend on healthy rain forests in Asia, Africa, and South America. But the increasing demand for more land for agricultural use and for wood products for construction worldwide now threatens these forests with destruction.

B. The quality of our air and even the climate of the world depend on healthy rain forests in Asia, Africa, and South America. But these rain forests are now threatened with destruction by the increasing demand for more land for agricultural use and for wood products used in construction worldwide.
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Old to new structure

• Creates “flow” in a paragraph
• Some try to use logical connectors like “moreover” and “however” to establish flow....but these don’t work on their own
• Instead, consider following a progression from old information (in the subject position or toward the end of the previous sentence) to new information (toward the end of the next sentence).
According to a recent survey, 26% of all American adults, down from 38% 30 years ago, now smoke. This __________ can be partly attributed to the mounting evidence linking smoking and fatal diseases, such as cancer.

The increased temperature favors decomposition and the ecosystem is more likely to become a carbon source. This __________ may prevail for 20-30 years after the disturbance event in areas with underlying permafrost.*

*From A. Lindegren’s Bsc thesis (2011)
Local Coherence: linking words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Subordinators (introduce a dependent clause that must be joined to a complete sentence)</th>
<th>Sentence Connectors (introduce a complete sentence or independent clause)</th>
<th>Phrase Linkers (introduce a noun phrase)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addition</td>
<td></td>
<td>furthermore, in addition, moreover, in addition to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adversativity</td>
<td>although even though despite the fact</td>
<td>however, nevertheless, despite in spite of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause and effect</td>
<td>because since</td>
<td>therefore as a result consequently hence thus¹</td>
<td>because of due to as a result of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td></td>
<td>in other words that is i.e.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td>while whereas</td>
<td>in contrast however on the other hand conversely</td>
<td>unlike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration</td>
<td></td>
<td>for example for instance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensification</td>
<td></td>
<td>on the contrary as a matter of fact in fact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Note that *thus* may also be used in non-finite clauses of result, as in this example: *A fungus infected the fruit, thus causing a significant economic loss to the farmers.* See Unit Three for further discussion of this point.
The biological clock functions regardless of the normal 24-hour cycle of light and darkness. Light is involved in resetting and regulating the clock.
Local Coherence: linking words

(handout)
Lasers have found widespread application in medicine. For example, lasers 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 eye 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.
Adapted from Hoel (2001) and Hillocks (1987).
Spend most of your drafting and revising time on the beginnings: the introduction to the whole, then the introductions to the major sections, then introductions to subsections, and long paragraphs, then the beginnings of sentences.
Examples and definitions from:


