

## Cohesion and Coherence Between and Within Paragraphs

### Questions:

- What makes essays and paragraphs logical and focused?
- How can choices about sentence structure make ideas easier for readers to follow?
- How can word choice help connect ideas within a text?

### Achieving coherence throughout your writing:

Establish the purpose of your writing (in any order that works for you):

- Craft a *thesis statement* that will clearly explain what your text is about;
- Brainstorm ideas or outline your ideas;
- Research your topic and think of possible ideas to support it;
- Adjust your thesis if necessary;
- Write, reread, and revise your draft several times to evaluate whether all parts of the text actually address your thesis and are explicitly tied to it through *cohesion devices* (see table below);
- Use headings and sub-headings (in longer texts, such as a thesis).

### Creating cohesive paragraphs and sentence structure:

- Deal with only one topic/idea per paragraph;
- Keep your paragraphs between four and ten sentences long (between 80 and 200 words);
- Keep subjects and verbs together;
- Put old information close to the beginning of the sentence and new information at the end of the sentence.  
*Bad example:* The time it takes the moon to orbit the Earth is called **the lunar month. Twenty-seven days** is one lunar month.  
*Good example:* The time it takes the moon to orbit the Earth is called **the lunar month. One lunar month** is twenty-seven days.

### Achieving cohesion (making words and sentences stick together):

- Repeat key words and phrases (in similar or different grammatical forms);
- Use synonyms for key words and phrases (to avoid repetition), and pronouns, and determiners to refer to other words or noun phrases in the text and avoid repetition.
- Link ideas with *cohesive devices* such as verb tenses, time references (for example *first, second, finally*), linking words (see table below), and grammatical references.

<b>cause and effect</b>	therefore, thus, consequently, hence, as a result of
<b>addition</b>	also, and, and then, equally important, finally, first, further, furthermore, in addition, in fact, in the first place, last, moreover, next, second
<b>comparison</b>	also, in the same way, likewise, similarly
<b>contrast and concession</b>	and yet, at the same time, even so, for all that, however, in contrast, in spite of this, instead, nevertheless, on the other hand, yet
<b>emphasis</b>	certainly, indeed, in fact
<b>example or illustration</b>	for example, in conclusion, in other words, namely, specifically, that is, to illustrate, thus
<b>summary</b>	in brief, in other words, in particular, in summary, in short, on the whole, that is, therefore
<b>time sequence</b>	eventually, finally, in the first place, in the past, last, next, second, simultaneously, so far, subsequently, then, thereafter, until now

*Example:* **Although dating advertisements** are currently very popular, they remain an under-researched area, especially within sociology. Little is known, **therefore**, about those using **such means** to establish new relationships nor what they say when producing descriptions of themselves for selective consumption by others in the dating market place. **Yet** dating advertisements can be a revealing site for examining the social construction of identities, and they can provide clear insights into advertisers' idealisations of themselves, **for example**, in terms of physical attributes, age, personalities and interests.

This handout is based on Dana Ferris' *Language Power: Tutorials for Writers* (to be published soon) and *Resources for Researchers*: an online tutorial from the University of Manchester (<http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/researcherdevelopment/PGR/resources/academicwriting/>).

**Ask yourself the following questions:**

- Do I have a topic sentence—a sentence that signals the main point of the paragraph?
- Do I have a summary sentence—a sentence that summarizes the ideas of the paragraph?
- Are there words or phrases in my topic sentence or summary sentence that make explicit connections to the thesis statement?
- Are there words in my topic sentence or summary sentence that connect the ideas in the paragraphs to the previous or following paragraphs?
- Are there cohesive devices that connect ideas and sentences to one another?

*Example:*

Until the **fourteenth century**, those who were born with **defective eyesight** and the aged had no hope of being able to read or carry out any kind of work that demanded good vision, for until then **spectacles** were unknown. Although fundamentally very simple, no **eyeglasses** could be made before the discovery of a number of techniques. Apart from a basic understanding of **optics** and the **behaviour of lenses**, it was essential to be able to produce clear glass and to know how to grind the **lenses** to the correct curvature.

**As early as the tenth century** the Arabs had made a special study of **optics** and the **diseases of the eye**, always prevalent among desert-dwelling people. Of **these Islamic scholars**, the most outstanding was Ibn al-Haytham, who worked in Egypt. In about 1040, **he** produced a **treatise on optics** in which, for the first time, the true function of the cornea (or **lens**) of the eye was described. Al-Haytham not only studied the anatomy of the eye but also the path of light as it was affected by mirrors and **glass lenses**. Strangely, **however**, al-Haytham never hit upon the idea of using **lenses** to correct **faulty eyesight**.

**By the late twelfth century**, copies of al-Haytham's **treatise on optics** were widely distributed throughout the libraries of Islam, most importantly in Spain, then under Arab rule. It was here that his works were translated into Latin, the common language of **European scholars**. Known to **Europeans** as Alhazan, al-Haytham's **treatise** formed the basis upon which many scholars worked. In England, **for example**, Grosseteste at Oxford University and **his** most brilliant **scholar**, Bacon, improved on al-Haytham's theories.

**At the same time**, many outstanding **Arab scholars** were attracted to the court of Emperor Frederick II in Sicily. Here **too**, the works of al-Haytham **were translated into Latin**. **Thus, by the middle of the thirteenth century**, many **European scholars** had become familiar with the basic **theories of optics**, and a small number were producing **their own** experimental **optical** equipment. The manufacture, **however**, of a limited number of **lenses** for **this kind** of work was a very different matter from the production of large numbers of **lenses** as would be required for the widespread use of **spectacles**.

In the previous example, on the early history of optics and spectacles, we can see that the connection between the paragraphs is indicated by periods of time.

- The first paragraph explains why spectacles were unknown until the fourteenth century.
- The second paragraph deals with tenth and eleventh century Arab treatises on optics, particularly that of Ibn al-Haytham.
- The third paragraph explains that his treatise had become known to Europeans by the late twelfth century.
- The final paragraph takes the story up to the middle of the thirteenth century with the early European production of lenses.

Also, if we consider the first paragraph, we can see the overall coherence of the text. The paragraph introduces both the idea of historical time periods, and the concepts of eyesight, spectacles/eyeglasses, optics, and lenses. All of these elements are referred to in the subsequent paragraphs.

This handout is based on Dana Ferris' *Language Power: Tutorials for Writers* (to be published soon) and *Resources for Researchers*: an online tutorial from the University of Manchester (<http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/researcherdevelopment/PGR/resources/academicwriting/>).