

Maintaining Coherence and Cohesion

Coherence refers to maintaining a clear focus within paragraphs, making connections between paragraphs, and connecting each paragraph to a central claim or thesis. Here are some ways to create coherence:

- Arrange paragraphs in a logical order
- End each paragraph with a sentence that not only wraps up the content of that paragraph but also anticipates the content of the next paragraph
- Begin each paragraph with a sentence that not only forecasts the content of the paragraph but also links to the thesis for the paper.
- Create cohesion/maintain connections between sentences

Cohesion means the connections between sentences. You can accomplish cohesion in three ways:

- by using pronouns that have clear antecedents,
- by using transition words or phrases that connect to what has gone before (e.g., moreover, furthermore, afterwards, nevertheless, in conclusion, therefore, indeed), and
- by using the known information to introduce new information (e.g., "The results of Reef Check 1997, the first comprehensive survey of the earth's coral reefs, will be released today. The survey. . ."), which is known as the **given-new contract**.

The Given-New Contract:

Readers comprehend a text more easily when the writer organizes the content to introduce new information only in the context of given information (i.e., information that is old, familiar, previously introduced or commonly understood). The strategy of presenting given information before new information can be applied at many levels of the text, but this handout focuses on the sentence level.

The topic of a single paragraph is often introduced explicitly by the first sentence (e.g., "This report describes recent research on automobile suspension systems."). The topic, recent research on automobile suspension systems, appears at the end of the introductory sentence because it is new to this text. However, once the topic has been introduced, it becomes given information. New information can be added to the same topic in additional sentences. In these sentences, the topic should appear early in the sentence as the subject, and the new information should appear at the end of the sentence.

Here are three methods for using the given-new contract in paragraphs (examples on reverse):

1. SAME SUBJECT STRATEGY. Sentences can elaborate on the topic, keeping the same subject (or an appropriate substitution term, such as a pronoun).
2. TOPIC HAND-OFF STRATEGY. Sentences can elaborate on a subtopic introduced at the end of a sentence about the main topic. Thus, each sentence ender may potentially be the "given" topic in the subject of the next sentence.
3. PREVIEW AND SHIFT STRATEGY. Sentences can explicitly introduce a new topic, using an appropriate transitional cue (e.g., "another related issue is whether...."). Or the paragraph can start off with a topic sentence that lists (previews) the upcoming topics in the paragraph.

Tips

- If you tend to confuse cohesion and coherence, remember that cohesion refers to sentences, and there is an s in the word cohesion. S = sentences.
- Cohesion can help create coherence because it allows a reader to follow the connection between sentences and ideas. However, a piece of writing can be cohesive and still lack coherence. For example, perhaps sentences within a paragraph maintain cohesion, but the connections between paragraphs are unclear. In other words, if each sentence were a brick, you could arrange them so they fit together, but they still may not form a house.

Same Subject Strategy:

The same subject (or a variation on it) is used at the start of each sentence to build on the information for the topic.

The Elite is currently the most popular racing shoe. In fact, it is worn by one of the world's top marathoners, T. Seko. It was developed by the innovative Nike Company. The Elite's most expensive feature is its waffle bottom. But the feature that runners value most is its seven ounce weight. The inventory of Elites includes many unusual sizes. For example, the Elite is made in triple E widths. The Elite is available in three different colors. However, it is easiest to obtain in blue. Finally, the Elite's low price is \$29.95.

Topic Hand-Off Strategy:

The end of one sentence explicitly provides the subject for the next. Each sentence builds on a subtopic related to the subject provided in the previous sentence.

One movie that really appealed to teenagers was **Star Wars**. It included countless zany and **exciting special effects**. One of the more impressive of these was the **light saber**. This lethal laser weapon once was used by awesome **Jedi Knights**. These Knights maintained **truth and justice** in the galaxies. But truth and justice were threatened by **vile and ruthless creatures**. These beings were led by **Darth Vader, a sinister and merciless warlord**. His goal was to destroy **all the planets that refused to submit to him**. The most important of these was Capricorn, the dune world.

Preview and Shift Strategy:

Sentences can explicitly introduce a new subject by using a transitional cue (see below in bold). Alternatively, the paragraph may start off with a sentence that forecasts all of the subjects that will appear in a paragraph in the order they appear.

As I mentioned previously, e-mail is the primary form of electronic communication at St. Mary's. **Currently**, e-mails on campus fall into two main categories. **Predictably**, the first category is individual e-mails, which can take the form of memos or notes. **Additionally**, individual e-mails are often personal and may be sent to single colleagues or small groups. **Somewhat unfortunately**, the second category is InsideSMCM messages, which are also sent through e-mail but are impersonal since they are directed at large groups on campus instead of individuals. **Although** both types of e-mails can serve the purpose of relaying news, information, and directives across campus, InsideSMCM is sometimes less effective since it is generally a one-way posting of information. **By contrast**, individual e-mails typically allow for two-way conversation and follow-up questions, so they tend to be more effective. **Despite** the potential usefulness of both types of e-mails, some people on campus do not read either one.