



How to:

Coherence and Cohesion in Writing

Important notice



At the end of this presentation there is a link to a Google Forms quiz. It is recommended that you score 80% or higher.

Please take your time viewing and studying this material before you proceed with the quiz.

Objectives

After studying this module, students will be able to:

- Identify areas that affect the comprehension of their writing.
- Apply tools that will help students at an intermediate and advanced level improve their writing.
- Become more aware of the role syntax plays in comprehension in a sentence.
- Be familiar with mistakes you should avoid in intermediate and advanced writing.

What is to Have Coherence in Writing?

Coherence in writing refers to how the structure of a phrase, sentence or text is able to transmit a message to the reader.

NO: Being an excellent dentist, I'm sure you can fix my dental problems.



The reader does not interpret right away WHO is the dentist.

YES: Since you are an excellent dentist, I'm sure you can fix my dental problems.



The reader knows the dentist is another person.

When transferring from our minds into a tangible form, it is **indispensable** to remember that, unlike other forms of communication in which you and the other person may have direct contact, it is a **one way passage** with writing. As a result, **good coherence** is when a reader can understand correctly the meaning of your words and your main idea.

What is to Have Cohesion in Writing?

Cohesion in writing is **HOW** and **WHAT** connects two or more ideas in a text. When a text is cohesive, the reader can identify a **logical line** that can be traced from sentence to sentence that demonstrates the properties that make your text whole. The best method to comprehend cohesion is studying cohesive devices, which will be discussed later on.

To understand the relationship between cohesion and coherence, remember the following rhetoric figure:

If coherence was a country in a map, then cohesion is the navigation instructions to connect it to a new land.

Relevant Factors that Influence Coherence and Cohesion

The most common factors that may improve or affect the coherence and cohesion of a text are:

- Sentence structure
- Vocabulary
- Repetition (intentional & unintentional)
- Connectors like conjunctions, prepositions, linking words, etc.

Why Do they Matter?

Coherence and cohesion are the aspects in writing that allow **readability** for the reader and **connects** all your ideas in your paper. Without them, the comprehension of your text is **compromised**.

There are many factors that make a text cohesive. However, the role of the following features in grammar are essential to analyze for more advanced English speakers:

- The role of **syntax**
- The role of **cohesive devices**

Writers familiar with these points can not only produce easy to follow texts, but they also integrate variations of vocabulary that intrigue and maintain the attention of the reader.

The Role of Syntax

Cohesion relies on correct word order within a sentence

What is syntax?

Syntax is the branch of linguistics that studies **how to structure a sentence**.

There are many parts of speech (**noun, pronoun, adjective, verb, adverb, preposition, conjunction, interjection**) that can interact in a sentence, but for it to be understood clearly it must follow a certain order. Especially, since many words can act as different parts of speech.

Syntax deals mainly with **cohesion**; because a sentence can be structured correctly without making any sense. For example,

Loud **apples** **love** sunbathing.

This sentence is grammatically correct because it has a **subject** and a **verb**, but internally it has no meaning (coherence). Sentences like this one can be used in creative writing projects; however, academic writing requires having both cohesion and coherence.

Syntactic Frames:

There are many rules on syntax; however, in this section we will mention some of the basics.

Some rules regarding syntax state the types of words that can precede or follow each word in a sentence; these are called **syntactic frames**.

For example:

She has been **painting** all afternoon. (verb)

This is my favorite **painting** of all time. (noun)

Although both sentences use the word “**painting**”, they are used differently in each sentence; which alters its meaning.

In the following slides we will discuss **syntactic frames** for: **nouns**, **verbs**, **adjectives**, and **adverbs**.

Nouns:

Syntactic frames for **nouns** stipulate that they will always go after determiners, possessive pronouns, and adjectives.

Here are some examples:

- **the apple** (Determiner “**the**” precedes “**apple**”)
- **his jacket** (Possessive pronoun “**his**” precedes “**jacket**”)
- **loud music** (Adjective “**loud**” precedes “**music**”)

Any distinguishing characteristic of a noun will be placed before it.

Verbs:

Syntactically, verbs should follow subject nouns and precede object nouns. Here are some examples:

Subject nouns:

The dog barked. (The verb “**barked**” follows the subject noun “**dog**”)

Object nouns:

They held hands. (The verb “**held**” precedes the object noun “**hands**”)

Also, verbs can be the first word in imperative sentences (express an order or command), for instance:

Watch out! (The verb “**watch**” precedes the preposition “**out**”)

Come with me. (The verb “**come**” precedes the preposition “**with**” and the pronoun “**me**”)

Adjectives:

Adjectives have two syntactic frames: preceding nouns or following linking verbs.

the old man (The adjective “**old**” precedes the noun “**man**”)

the girls are happy (The adjective “**happy**” follows the verb “**are**” and noun “**girls**”)

Adverbs

For adverbs it is difficult to identify a syntactic frame because they are movable: they can be placed almost anywhere in a sentence. For example,

Loudly, they sang in the car all the way home.

They sang **loudly** in the car all the way home.

They **loudly** sang in the car all the way home.

They sang in the car all the way home **loudly**.

The adverb “**loudly**” is placed in the beginning, before and after the verb, and at the end of the sentence. The placement of an adverb will depend on the emphasis you want it to have in a sentence.

Determiners, Prepositions, Auxiliary Verbs, and Conjunctions:

Unlike nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs there are some parts of speech that don't have different functions or meaning in a sentence. They are the following:

- **Determiners**: always precede a **noun**. These can be **articles** (**a**, **an**, **the**); **possessive** (**my**, **your**, **his**, etc.); **demonstrative** (**that**, **those**, **this**, **these**); **numerals** and **ordinals** (**one**, **first**, **two**, **second**, etc.); and quantifiers (some, a lot, a few, etc.). Remember that **articles** can be **definite** (**the**) or **indefinite** (**a**, **an**). An **indefinite article** is used to talk about someone or something in a general sense; while a **definite article** is used when referring to a specific someone or something.
- **Prepositions**: these create prepositional phrases and can be placed anywhere in a sentence.
- **Auxiliary verbs**: their placement will depend on the main verb of the sentence.
- **Conjunctions**: join words and phrases (**and**, **or**, **but**)

Sentence Structure 101

Generally, a sentence is as a statement that expresses a complete thought.

1. Syntactically this means following the usual structure of a sentence, which includes a **subject** and a **verb**. If a statement is missing a subject or a verb it is called a **sentence fragment**.

They sang loudly in the car all the way home. (Complete Sentence)

In the car all the way home. (Sentence fragment: it's a prepositional phrase without a verb or a subject)

1. Sentences in English follow the **Subject-Verb-Object** word order.

I saw Martha.

View our module "[Direct vs Indirect Objects](#)" for more information.

1. There are four types of sentences: **Simple**, **Compound**, **Complex**, and **Compound-Complex**. For more information on how to structure sentences check out our module "[Types of Sentence Structures](#)".
2. **Separate sentences for separate ideas.**
3. It's important to have **subject-verb agreement**, that is the verb must be conjugated in the correct tense depending on your subject and remain consistently in the same tense throughout the sentence. Here's a module that elaborates on this idea "[Subject-Verb Agreement](#)".

The Role of Cohesive Devices

Connectors, Linking Words, Anaphoras and more

What are Cohesive Devices?

Cohesive devices (CD) are the elements in a text that connect one idea to another. These may be words or phrases. There are various types of cohesive devices, but the main ones are:

- 1) Pronouns
- 2) Synonym or substitutes
- 3) Transition words

CD have various uses in text. The most common use for CD is to serve as a connector of the **subjects** and **arguments** to avoid being **repetitive** or **redundant**.

Pronouns

When writing an analysis, the student will be writing various paragraphs presenting different ideas that contribute to an overall argument. For this reason, you may find yourself **mentioning constantly the name of your target/subject**, which may start to look monotonous. However, this is where **CD** are crucial.

Pronouns are grammatical units that **replace** the noun of a sentence that has already been mentioned previously:

William Shakespeare had written an enormous amount of plays. **He is** well-known **for his** work titled *The Tempest*.

DON'T DO: **William Shakespeare** had written an enormous amount of plays. One of the most well-known works of **William Shakespeare** is titled *The Tempest*.

Pronouns

There are two major categories of pronouns:

- 1) **Definite pronouns:** That refer to a specific person or thing.
 - a) she, he, it, they, them, and us
- 2) **Indefinite pronouns:** That do not specify the person or thing.
 - a) everybody, nobody, someone, etc.

It is important to note that you may also need to use other types of pronouns and/or determiners, hence the importance of having **syntax knowledge** to achieve complete coherence and cohesion.

Pronouns of English

Subject Pronouns				Object Pronouns			
1 st Person Singular	I	1 st Person Plural	We	1 st Person Singular	Me	1 st Person Plural	Us
2 nd Person Singular	You	2 nd Person Plural	You all	2 nd Person Singular	You	2 nd Person Plural	You all
3 rd Person Singular	He She It	3 rd Person Plural	They	3 rd Person Singular	Him Her It	3 rd Person Plural	Them

Possessive Adjectives (Determiners)				Possessive Pronouns			
1 st Person Singular	My	1 st Person Plural	Our	1 st Person Singular	Mine	1 st Person Plural	Ours
2 nd Person Singular	Your	2 nd Person Plural	Your	2 nd Person Singular	Yours	2 nd Person Plural	Yours
3 rd Person Singular	His Her Its	3 rd Person Plural	Their	3 rd Person Singular	His Hers Its	3 rd Person Plural	Theirs

Reflexive Pronouns				Indefinite Pronouns				
1 st Person Singular	Myself	1 st Person Plural	Ourselves	People More formal	Someone	People Less Formal	Somebody	
2 nd Person Singular	Yourself	2 nd Person Plural	Yourselves		Anyone		Anybody	
3 rd Person Singular	Himself Herself Itself	3 rd Person Plural	Themselves		No one		Nobody	
				Places	Everyone	Things	Everybody	
					Somewhere		Something	
					Anywhere		Anything	

Synonyms and Substitutes

In longer works and specific scenarios, **pronouns may not be enough** to eliminate the monotony that is affecting the coherence of your work. In those cases, the use of **synonyms** and certain **substitutes for nouns** are essential:

William Shakespeare had written an enormous amount of **plays**. **He is** well-known **for his work** titled “The Tempest”. Unlike other **Shakespearean texts**, “The Tempest” is one of the **playwright’s creative work** that has echoes of subjects that can be related to the colonial experience in the Caribbean.

The idea is to be **creative** and to have as much **variation** as possible. As you get more familiar with your research, you will have more vocabulary and acquire new ways to refer to your subject.

Synonyms and Substitutes: Tips & Tools

Tips & Hints:

- An online thesaurus is a great way to find synonyms.
- For names of authors, you may **shorten** it to the last name (William Shakespeare to Shakespeare) or their title after the first mention (author, critic, filmmaker, etc.).
- Keep in mind that when referring to **multiple authors**, verify if you have stated clearly **WHO** you are talking about in the specific paragraph.



Transition Words

Connectors, linking words, transitional phrases and words are a few of the names **CD** and this category. Their purpose is to serve as bridges between one sentence/idea to another.

The play focuses on the experiences of the sorcerer Prospero and his master-slave relationship with Ariel and Caliban. **However**, an underlying theme that is hidden between the lines is the relationship of language with their social status. **Equally**, it is the extent of the knowledge of the **former** that **determines** the latter, resulting in the dichotomy of man and monster.

Unlike the previous categories, they do **NOT REPLACE** the noun or **ELIMINATE** the repetitions.

Transition Words

It is important to consider that each type of transition word has a different function:

- Addition: To **add** a **new idea**.
- Illustration: To **demonstrate** a point.
- Cause and effect: **Establishing** the idea mentioned beforehand as **motive** and the following as the **result**.
- Comparison: To **underline** similarities.
- Contrast: To **show** differences.
- Emphasis: To **highlight** a detail.
- Time & Sequence: To **set up** an order.
- Direction & Place: To **specify** where something may be found (this applies to literary texts [i.e. analysis of settings] or more scientific research)

TRANSITION WORDS

ADDITION	ILLUSTRATION	CAUSE AND EFFECT	COMPARISON
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As well as• And• Too• Furthermore• Also• In addition to• Not only – but also• Or	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Such as• In this case• For one thing• For instance• For example• In the case of• Illustrated by• As an example	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Therefore• So• Because• Thus• Hence• Due to• As a result• Consequently	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As ...as• As if• Equally• Similarly• Like• In the same way• Comparable• In like manner
CONTRAST	EMPHASIS	TIME & SEQUENCE	DIRECTION & PLACE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• But• However• On the other hand• Otherwise• Unlike• Conversely• At the same time• In spite of	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Especially• Also• In particular• Furthermore• In addition• Indeed• Of course• Certainly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Later• After• Before• Then• Next• Soon• Finally• First, second...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Here• There• Over there• Beyond• Under• To the left• In the distance• Opposite



Related modules on our website:

For cohesion, all of the modules on Grammar, such as:

- [Direct vs. Indirect Object](#)
- [Parts of Speech: Focus on Modifiers](#)
- [Subject-Verb Agreement](#)
- [Prepositional Phrase](#)
- [Types of Sentence Structure](#)

For coherence:

- [Thesis Statement and Topic Sentences](#)
- [Transitional Words and Phrases](#)
- [How to Structure a Sentence](#)

Checklist:

After finishing your essay, verify if:

- ☐ Your sentences follow proper syntax rules.
- ☐ If multiple authors or works are mentioned, be sure that the reader can identify the subject at all time.
- ☐ Vary in your **CD** throughout the work.
- ☐ After integrating your **CD**, check that you follow word order properly.
- ☐ Your vocabulary is at an academic level.

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Para finalizar, haga clic sobre el enlace para tomar la prueba y enviar el informe a su profesor(a):

<https://forms.gle/DLQ2CXfcCfzjmtkb9>

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