



Cohesive writing

Paragraphing

WHAT IS COHESION?

Cohesion is a quality of effective writing. Cohesive writing helps readers understand how the details relate to the overall argument of a text and to follow it easily. The quality of cohesion in a written text is achieved by various means, which make different elements of the text hold together well: logical conjunction, grammatical referencing, lexical choice and paragraphing. This resource focuses on paragraphing.

CREATING EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHS WITHIN A TEXT

Paragraphing is crucial for effective control over the flow of information through a text, and developing an argument. It helps readers easily follow a text's logic from start to finish, and understand points in the ongoing presentation of ideas.

An effective paragraph presents one clear idea, through a sequence of related sentences. If the text is arguing (eg an essay), it makes a series of points, and each point is constructed in a separate paragraph. If the text is describing and explaining (eg a report), paragraphs still tend to begin with a 'topic sentence', which is elaborated through subsequent sentences, each providing some evidence or example relevant to the main idea. For example:

Example A: paragraphing (History)

According to the reports of Captain James Cook and Sir Joseph Banks, Botany Bay offered many advantages. These included a coastal area with a sheltered port, a pleasant climate, fertile soil, food sources including wild fruits, vegetables, birds and fish, and an environment in which the convicts could be self-sufficient in a year. It was also attractive due to its great distance from Britain and the fact that the convicts would have no means of escape. In addition, it offered two significant advantages: it was a strategic stronghold in the East and it promised to be an important naval store of flax, hemp and timber.

topic sentence

following sentences elaborate with details of advantages

final sentence transitions to next paragraph, which will say more about naval supplies

Topic sentences usually occur at or near the beginning of a paragraph, to give the reader a preview of what the rest of the paragraph is about. They establish the topic in brief or abstract terms, before the paragraph then goes on to expand, explain and illustrate. This pattern makes it easy for readers to predict what is coming, and to follow the unfolding text.

Example B: paragraphing (Law)

In terms of money or property claims, contingency fees encompass an important attribute of access to justice for all sections of the community.

end of previous paragraph

It is evident that the court system will not always ensure justice in our legal system. **With funding and delay restrictions on courts, access to justice can be initiated through various other methods.**

transition from previous topic to new one

topic sentence

ACADEMIC LITERACY

Example B: paragraphing (Law)

Gaining more popularity and acceptance most recently is alternative dispute resolution (ADR) where the parties to a dispute attempt to resolve their differences themselves with the aid of a third party. The parties aim towards a “consensual settlement” (Sackville, 1995, p 215) typically through mediation. ADR holds advantages over litigation in the reduction of court delays and the costs to parties, and the potential for hostilities to be extinguished. Through these elements, ADR has brought about much progress in access to justice, evidenced by its incorporation into Federal Court, Family Court and Administrative Appeals Tribunal proceedings (AJAC, 1994, p xxxix).

next sentences elaborate with details about methods of accessing justice

IDENTIFYING THE FUNCTION OF SENTENCES WITHIN A PARAGRAPH

The following paragraphs are from a first year essay in Business. Essays develop an argument, by making a series of related points. Notice how a point is made in each paragraph, by first establishing the topic and making a claim about it, and then providing some supporting information:

Example: making a point within an essay (Business)

There are a number of users of accounting information who may require less detailed reports than those mentioned above, but who will still have valid reason to request such information.

Employees and their Trade Unions are interested in the financial success and stability of the business as it indicates the scope for possible wage and fringe benefit increases (Barton 1989, p 32). Customers often insist on having a copy of the contractor’s statement of financial position. Competitors of public companies are always interested in the operating results and financial positions of their rivals, and suppliers are concerned with the company’s ability to pay for any goods supplied on credit.

As well as the questions of who financial information should be directed at and what those groups require that information for, **there are other questions that should be considered.** For example, should customer satisfaction be given a value and incorporated into financial reports? Sales revenue can be very large in one period, and considerably smaller in the next if dissatisfied customers return items purchased earlier. (Barret, Verastergui, 1985, p 261). Another obscure factor is whether or not changing price levels should be reflected in adjustments to financial statements. By considering the two main questions proposed previously, “who requires the information” and “for what reason”, answers to these questions may be found; however, they are still surrounded by an air of ambiguity.

topic sentence

elaborating sentences (provide explanation, details and examples supporting the claim that people sometimes need accounting more information)

transition

topic sentence

elaborating sentences, providing examples to explain the claim that more needs to be considered



MAINTAINING FOCUS

In the first example above, the paragraph was about the advantages of Botany Bay for colonists. The focus was kept on that topic throughout the paragraph by the internal organisation of sentences:

Example: maintaining focus within a paragraph (History)

According to the reports of Captain James Cook and Sir Joseph Banks, Botany Bay offered many **advantages**. **These** included a coastal area with a sheltered port, a pleasant climate, fertile soil, food sources including wild fruits, vegetables, birds and fish, and an environment in which the convicts could be self-sufficient in a year. **It** was also attractive due to its great distance from Britain and the fact that the convicts would have no means of escape. In addition, **it** offered two significant advantages: it was a strategic stronghold in the East and **it** promised to be an important naval store of flax, hemp and timber.

*beginning of each supportive sentence **begins** with a reference back to something in the second half of the topic sentence [advantages or Botany Bay]*

In English, the first position within a sentence is extremely important – it tells a reader what the sentence is about. It indicates the ‘Theme’ of the clause, to which the rest of the clause then adds new information. In the paragraph above, about Botany Bay, the writer maintains focus on the perceived advantages of Botany Bay through the whole paragraph by beginning each new sentence with a reference back to this, and then adding new information about that topic in the later part of each sentence:

Theme (information put first)	Rheme (new information put second in clauses)
According to the reports of Captain James Cook and Sir Joseph Banks,	Botany Bay offered many advantages.
These	included a coastal area with a sheltered port, a pleasant climate, fertile soil, food sources including wild fruits, vegetables, birds and fish, and an environment in which the convicts could be self sufficient in a year.
It	was also attractive due to its great distance from Britain and the fact that the convicts would have no means of escape.
In addition, it	offered two significant advantages:
it	was a strategic stronghold in the East
and it	promised to be an important naval store of flax, hemp and timber.

Another common pattern of Theme development within a paragraph is when the ending of one sentence (Rheme) becomes the beginning (Theme) of the following one:

Theme	Rheme
Macarthur and Bligh	clashed almost immediately on Bligh's arrival in the colony in August 1806.
Bligh	was greeted with the great social and economic problems that were facing the colony.
These social and economic problems	had left most of the smaller settlers struggling.



To maintain cohesion, the topic introduced at the start is regularly positioned at the beginning of following clauses through a paragraph, to signal it is still the main topic. Consider the following paragraph:

Example 1: cohesive flow of information through a paragraph

The compelling sound of an infant's cry makes it an effective distress signal and appropriate to the human infant's prolonged dependence on a caregiver. However, cries are discomfoting and may be alarming to parents, many of whom find it very difficult to listen to their infant's crying for even short periods of time. Many reasons for crying are obvious, like hunger and discomfort due to heat, cold, hunger, illness and the lying position. These reasons, however, account for a relatively small percentage of infant crying and are usually recognised quickly and alleviated. In the absence of a discernible reason for the behaviour, crying often stops when the infant is held. In most infants, there are frequent episodes of crying with no apparent cause, and holding or other soothing techniques seem ineffective. Infants cry and fuss for a mean of 1.75 hrs a day at age two weeks, 2.75 hrs a day at age six weeks, and 1 hr a day at age twelve weeks.

topical Themes are underlined

'crying', introduced in the topic sentence, is then repeated in following sentences, within Theme position

(from Eggins, S (1994) *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*, Pinter, London, p 5.)

Notice how the information flows smoothly in the above paragraph, because it is presented in a way that keeps reader focused on the topic of crying.

In the following report text, the Theme in each clause is underlined. There is a clear pattern in the thematic development across the texts' various paragraphs. Some new information (Rheme) from the topic sentence at the beginning of the text is picked up as Theme in the topic sentences of each new paragraph:

Example 2: cohesive flow of information through several paragraphs

All matter may be classified as either **solids**, liquid or gas. Solids are firm and have a definite form. Rubber, wood, glass, iron, cotton, and sand are all classified as solids. As the atoms or molecules of a solid are densely packed, and as they have very little freedom of movement, most solids require a considerable force in order to change their shape or volume.

new information in text's first topic sentence (solids, liquid or gas) becomes starting point for following paragraphs

Solids may be further divided into two classes: crystalline and amorphous. Crystalline solids include rocks, wood, paper and cotton. These solids are made up of atoms arranged in a definite pattern. When they are heated, the change to a liquid, known as melting, is sharp and clear. Amorphous solids include rubber, glass and sulphur. In these substances the pattern of the atoms is not orderly, and when they are heated, they gradually soften.

focus is maintained within paragraph by starting each sentence with an example or components of the initial Theme (solids)

Liquids, on the other hand, are not rigid. If water, milk, or oil is poured on a table, it will flow all over the surface. The atoms or molecules of liquids attract each other and thereby enable liquids to flow. However, these atoms are loosely structured and they do not keep their shape. Therefore, a liquid will take the shape of any container in which it is poured.

focus maintained by starting each sentence with examples of Theme (liquids)

Gases, such as air, oxygen, and carbon dioxide, have no fixed shape or volume of their own. They diffuse, as they spread out to fill any container. If water is put into a tyre, it will run to the bottom; if air is put into a tyre, it fills the whole space inside. The atoms or molecules of gases are widely spaced and move very rapidly. They therefore expand or compress to fit any area.

focus maintained by each new Theme (gases)

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