

Cohesive Writing Module: Introduction

Introduction

In this module, we will examine elements of academic writing that contribute to making a piece of writing cohesive. When you are writing assignments at university the way that you link your ideas logically through your text is by a combination of grammatical and vocabulary systems. Each unit of this module will investigate aspects of a system and explain how to develop skills in applying these to your own writing.




Who is this module for?

All students at university who need to improve their knowledge of clearer paragraph writing.

What does this module cover?

Unit 1	Paragraph Structure
Unit 2	Linking Themes within Paragraphs
Unit 3	Cohesion in Word Choice
Unit 4	Cohesion through Reference

Exercises

These are marked with the icon  and you should try to complete them before checking your work in the **Answer Key**, marked  .

Answer Key to all Exercises

This can be found at the end of the Unit.

Cohesive Writing Module

Unit 3: Cohesion in Word Choice

1.0 Introduction

In this unit we will look at how vocabulary choice helps us to develop a piece of writing. The word choices a writer makes help to develop the ideas of a text so that the relationships between ideas are clear to the reader and the text as a whole is cohesive i.e. all parts of the text relate together and work together.

As we have seen in Units 1 and 2 of this **Cohesive Writing** module, cohesion is an important feature of academic texts. This unit aims to help you understand how the vocabulary items in a piece of writing contribute to its overall cohesion.

Objectives of Unit 3

After you have completed this unit you should be able to:

- recognise the types of connections that occur between vocabulary items and how these contribute to the cohesion of a piece of writing
- identify problems in writing where the vocabulary choices interfere with the cohesion of the writing
- understand the need to select appropriate vocabulary for particular contexts and to build up the cohesiveness of your own writing through appropriate word choices.

2.0 Different types of relationships between words

There are four different types of relationships between words: repetition, synonym/antonym, general/specific and collocation.

2.1 Repetition

The most obvious way of showing that an idea is related to one that has been mentioned earlier in the text is to simply **repeat** a word or a form of the word that was used before, for example:

Stress is often called a disease of contemporary life. It seems that our modern world has not only created an advanced technological **environment** but also a *stressful environment*.

One common problem that students have in their writing is to use too much repetition. Instead of developing the idea by using other related words, the same word or a form of the same word is used repeatedly throughout the writing. Not only is this boring to read, but it can be an indication of a limited understanding of the topic.

★ Exercise 1

Underline the examples in this paragraph of repetition of the word 'stress'. Notice that this word is used too much and so the writing becomes boring.

Stress is a term adopted from engineering science by psychology and medicine. Simply defined, stress in engineering means force upon an area. As so many forces are working upon us in the modern age, and we find it extremely difficult to cope under so much stress, stress is called the "disease of civilization". Phillip Zimbardo traces four interrelated levels at which we react to the stresses exerted upon us from our environment. The four are: the emotional level, the behavioural level, the physiological level, and the cognitive level. The emotional responses to stress are sadness, depression, anger, irritation and frustration. The behavioural responses to stress are poor concentration, forgetfulness, poor interpersonal relations, and lowered productivity. The physiological responses to stress consist of bodily tensions, which may lead to headaches, backaches, stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, and even killer diseases. At the cognitive level one may respond to stress by losing self-esteem and self-confidence which leads to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. At worst, such a stressed person may even end up committing suicide.

(adapted from Lily de Silva, **One Foot in the World**, Wheel Publication, 1986)

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

2.2 Synonyms and antonyms

By choosing a vocabulary item with a similar meaning (synonym) to one mentioned before, a writer can show the relationship between ideas. Relationships can also be shown by using a word with the opposite meaning (antonym). By using synonyms and antonyms, it is possible to avoid using too much repetition of the same word.

★ Exercise 2

Read the text and underline examples of synonyms and antonyms, noting with an S or an A which type of relationship it is.

Energy is the most important resource of modern society: without power to work our machines and give us heat and light our society could not exist. Until half way through this century mankind was confident that the world's supply of fossilised energy would last forever. But now that proposition has been questioned and it seems that our supplies of coal, gas and oil are destined to run out. The production of nuclear energy leaves the producer with dangerous waste materials to dispose of. For these reasons mankind is investigating alternative sources of energy and, of these, solar energy, energy collected

from the sun seems the most promising. This assignment will explain in detail how solar energy is collected for the generation of heat. It will examine the design and use of low temperature, medium temperature and high temperature collectors.

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

2.3 General and specific words

Vocabulary items which are more general or specific examples of the item mentioned earlier in the text, also create textual cohesion. For example 'fruit' is a **general** term, which includes the **specific** examples of 'apple, passion-fruit, lemon'. In the example for Exercise 2, '*fossilised energy*' is a general term covering the more specific words '*coal, gas and oil*'.

★ Exercise 3

Find the specific items relating to more general terms in the 'energy' paragraph?

General term	Specific terms
energy	
collectors	

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

2.4 Collocation

There is a tendency for particular vocabulary items to occur together often. This is called **collocation**. In scientific writing, for example, collocations occur between certain nouns and verbs. For example, data are *collected* and *analysed* but never *observed*. Other examples include:

- *to conduct a survey* (not to give a survey)
- *to perform analyses* (not to handle analyses)
- *to obtain data* (not to carry out data)

★ Exercise 4

Read the following sentence from a student's essay.

Despite lack of efficiency, the registered medicine practitioners received advantages over their alternative competitors ...

Here the word *received* does not collocate well with *advantages*. The tutor marking the paper has put a mark through it indicating that it is not a good choice. Can you think of a more appropriate word?

Despite lack of efficiency, the registered medicine practitioners ~~received~~ advantages over their alternative competitors ...

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

3.0 Word relationships across the text

3.1 A mixture of relationships

In any one piece of writing, all these different relationships can, and normally do, occur between the vocabulary items chosen.

★ Exercise 5

Identify the connections in the first part of the '*energy*' text between each of the words listed in the left-hand column. Put a tick in the appropriate column to show how the words are each related to the first one "energy".

Energy is the most important resource of modern society: without power to work our machines and give us heat and light our society could not exist. Until half way through this century mankind was confident that the world's supply of fossilised energy would last forever. But now that proposition has been questioned and it seems that our supplies of coal, gas and oil are destined to run out.

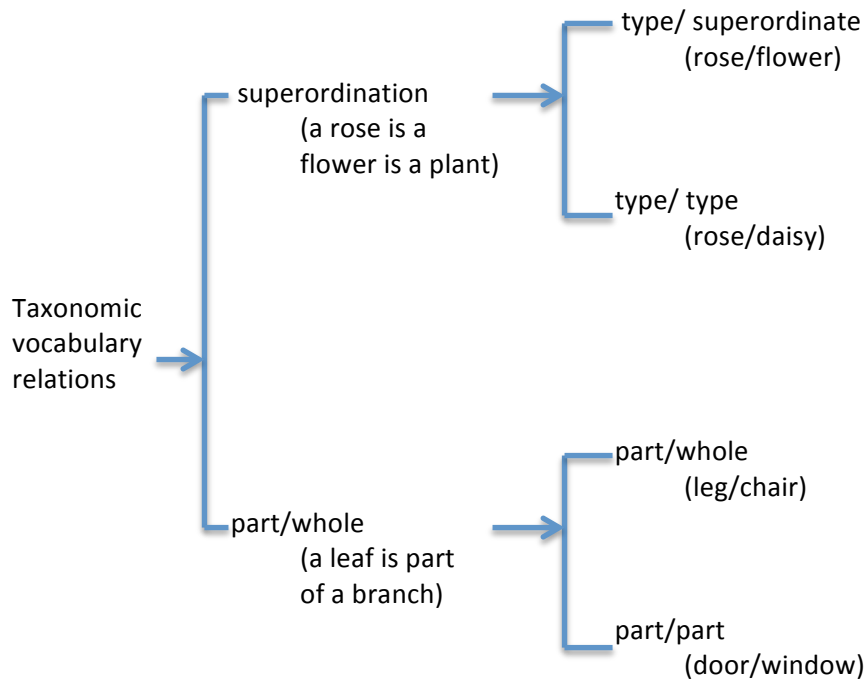
Words related to "energy"	Relationship between each word and "energy"			
	Repetition	Synonym or Antonym	General or Specific	Collocation
resource				
power				
heat				
light				
fossilised energy				
coal				
gas				
oil				

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

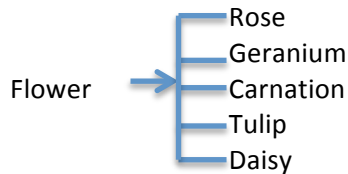
3.2 General and Specific relationships: Taxonomies

We can look in more detail at relationships between general vocabulary items and specific vocabulary items. These relationships can form **taxonomies** of vocabulary items where one item is a **type** or kind of another, for example a rose (specific) is a kind of flower (general), or where one item is a **part** of another, for example a leaf is a part of a plant.

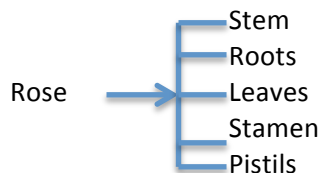
These relationships are shown in the following diagram:



To illustrate how a taxonomy works, we can develop the above examples. **A rose is one type of flower.** Geranium, carnation, cornflower, tulip and daisy are others. Hence:



Each flower has the following parts: stem, roots, leaves, stamen, pistils. Hence:



★ Exercise 6

Read the following piece of writing. It is the introduction to a scientific published paper. As you are reading, notice the way that the vocabulary chosen is building up a 'taxonomy' about rice-growing areas. Fill in the diagram below to show how the words fit into this taxonomy.

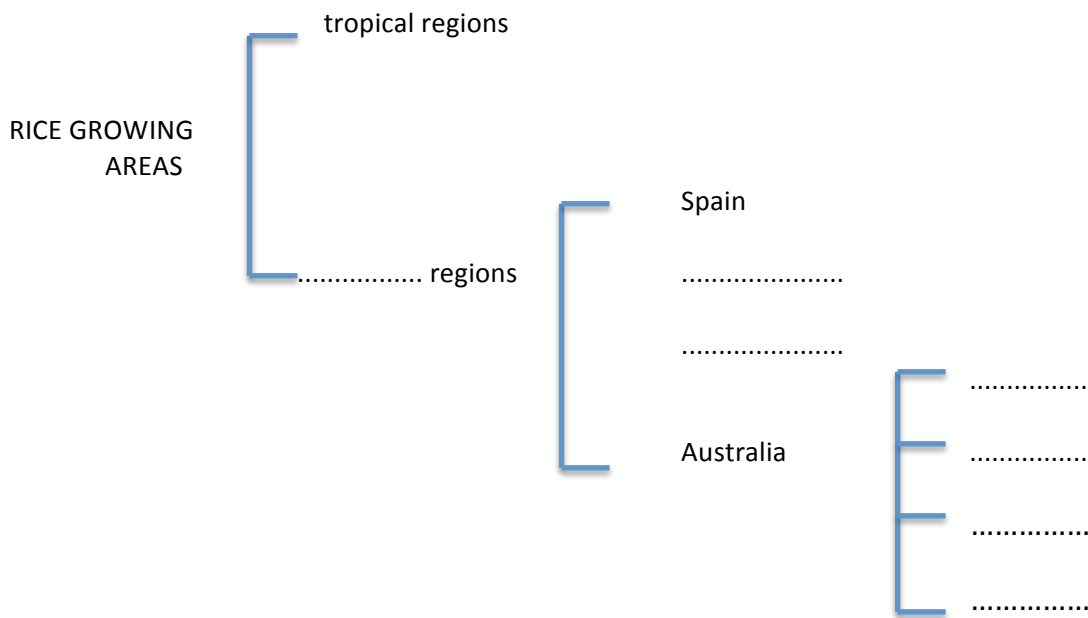
Rice (*Oryza sativa*) is traditionally grown in tropical regions of the world, but the availability of irrigation has led to the establishment of rice growing areas in temperate regions, such as Spain, Italy and California.

The rice industry in Australia began in the 1920s in irrigation areas along the Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers, and these areas currently produce more than 95% of the total Australian crop of about 500,000 t/year, with the remainder being produced in Queensland in the Burdekin Valley and the Atherton Tablelands areas (about 15,000t/y) and the Ord River area of Western Australia (less than 2,000t/y). While about 90% of the Australian crop is exported, the 10% consumed locally constitutes the bulk of rice available in Australia (M. Goldring, Rice-growers Co-operative Mills, Ltd., pers. commun.)

Rice is available in Australia in three forms; as white or polished rice that has had the bran layer removed by abrasive milling, as brown or unpolished rice that has the bran layer retained and as parboiled rice that has been partially cooked with the bran layer on the grain and after drying, the bran layer removed by milling.

This paper reports on a laboratory investigation of the nutrient composition of seven brands of Australian commercially-produced rice, including white, parboiled and brown rice, available in retail outlets and the changes in the levels of some B-vitamins and minerals during cooking. (Willis R. Palipane, K. Greenfield, H. 1985 Composition of Australian foods 13 rice)

Taxonomy of rice-growing areas



Unit 2: Answer Key to Exercises

★ ★ Exercise 1: Answer

Stress is a term adopted from engineering science by psychology and medicine. Simply defined, stress in engineering means force upon an area. As so many forces are working upon us in the modern age, and we find it extremely difficult to cope under so much stress, stress is called the "disease of civilization". Phillip Zimbardo traces four interrelated levels at which we react to the stresses exerted upon us from our environment. The four are: the emotional level, the behavioural level, the physiological level, and the cognitive level. The emotional responses to stress are sadness, depression, anger, irritation and frustration. The behavioural responses to stress are poor concentration, forgetfulness, poor interpersonal relations, and lowered productivity. The physiological responses to stress consist of bodily tensions, which may lead to headaches, backaches, stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, and even killer diseases. At the cognitive level one may respond to stress by losing self-esteem and self-confidence which leads to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. At worst, such a stressed person may even end up committing suicide.

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★ ★ Exercise 2: Answer

Energy is the most important resource of modern society: without power to work our machines and give us heat and light our society could not exist. Until half way through this century mankind was confident that the world's supply of fossilised energy would last forever. But now that proposition has been questioned and it seems that our supplies of coal, gas and oil are destined to run out. The production of nuclear energy leaves the producer with dangerous waste materials to dispose of. For these reasons mankind is investigating alternative sources of energy and, of these, solar energy, energy collected from the sun seems the most promising. This assignment will explain in detail how solar energy is collected for the generation of heat. It will examine the design and use of low temperature, medium temperature and high temperature collectors.

S (Synonyms): energy/power
solar/sun

A (Antonyms) last forever/run out

★ ★ Exercise 3: Answer

General term	Specific terms
energy	solar (energy)
	fossilised (energy)
	nuclear (energy)
collectors	low temperature
	medium temperature
	high temperature

★ ★ Exercise 4: Answer

had
enjoyed

★ ★ Exercise 5: Answer

Words related to "energy"	Relationship between each word and "energy"			
	Repetition	Synonym or Antonym	General or Specific	Collocation
resource		✓ (S)		
power		✓ (S)		
heat			✓	
light			✓	
fossilised energy			✓	
coal			✓	
gas			✓	
oil			✓	

★ ★ Exercise 6: Answer

