

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 2: Linking Themes within a Paragraph

1.0 Introduction

In the first unit of this module, Unit 1 'Paragraph Structure', we looked at the way longer texts use their introduction to point out how the whole text will be structured; and how paragraphs use their introductions to point out what the rest of the paragraph is about.

In this Unit we will continue to look at ways to link ideas logically in your writing, but this time at the smaller-scale level of the sentence. We will begin by looking at sentences themselves, and then go on to identify how sentences are strung together to build up the structure of the paragraphs.

Objectives of Unit 2

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

- recognise the way that information is structured in sentences
- develop a logical structure for your own sentences to focus on your ideas.

1.1 Structuring information in a sentence

Beginning of sentence	Middle of Sentence	End of Sentence
This part of the sentence usually tells us what the rest of the sentence is going to be about. It usually includes all the words up to the main verb.	The main verb.	This part of the sentence tells us what the sentence is about. It includes all the words after the main verb
THEME	NEW INFORMATION	

Here is an example sentence broken down into its parts:

<i>In the earliest time, people</i>	<i>carved or painted</i>	<i>messages on rocks.</i>
Beginning	Middle	End
THEME	NEW INFORMATION	

If we change the sentence Theme, we can see that the focus of the sentence changes, even though it contains basically the same information.

<i>Messages</i>	<i>were carved or painted</i>	<i>on rocks by people in the earliest times.</i>
Beginning	Middle	End
THEME	NEW INFORMATION	

Each time we change the sentence around, we are actually changing the information structure and therefore the **focus** of the meaning.

<i>Rocks, on which messages were carved or painted</i>	<i>were</i>	<i>the earliest medium of written communication</i>
Beginning	Middle	End
THEME	NEW INFORMATION	

If the sentence has more than one clause, then each clause has the same beginning, middle, end structure. For example, here is the second clause of the second sentence in the original paragraph below.

<i>and books</i>	<i>were</i>	<i>laboriously copied by hand.</i>
Beginning	Middle	End
THEME	NEW INFORMATION	

1.2 Focussing through Theme choices

To write effectively you should be conscious of how you are structuring your information. Through an awareness of Theme and New information it is possible to deliberately focus on what you want to impart to the reader. We can see how this focus can be shifted by changing the information structure of the sentences and clauses in the following example:

Original paragraph:

In the earliest times, people carved or painted messages on rocks. **Later on, people** wrote on pieces of leather, rolled into scrolls. **During the Middle Ages, heavy paper called parchment** was used for writing, **and books** were laboriously copied by hand. **Then in the middle of the fifteenth century, with the invention of the printing press, the birth of the modern printing industry** was possible. **And now the advent of computers** is rapidly revolutionising the process of communication.

Rewritten paragraph:

Rocks, on which messages were carved or painted, were the earliest medium of written communication. **Pieces of leather, however,** had the advantage of being portable when rolled into scrolls **and they** replaced rock carvings. **These leather scrolls** were in turn replaced in the Middle Ages. **Parchment books** took over and were laboriously copied by hand until the invention of the printing press. **Printed books** have been central to the communication process for centuries **but various forms of electronic media** will undoubtedly replace them in the end.

Themes in the original paragraph	Themes in the rewritten paragraph
In the earliest times people, Later on, people During the Middle Ages, heavy paper called parchment and books Then in the middle of the fifteenth century, with the invention of the printing press, the birth of the modern printing industry And now the advent of computers	Rocks, on which messages were carved or painted, Pieces of leather, however, and they These leather scrolls parchment books Printed books but various forms of electronic media

Notice how the original paragraph focussed on the time periods: it was concerned with explaining how things changed over time. The rewritten paragraph focuses on the kinds of materials that were used for communication.

★ Exercise 1

Read the following text on 'Stress'. Underline the sentence Themes. Then decide what you think the author wants us to focus on: what is the purpose of this paragraph?

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 pressure, stress is called the 'disease of civilisation'. Phillip Zimbardo, traces four interrelated levels at which we react to the pressure 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 are poor concentration, forgetfulness, poor interpersonal relations, and lowered productivity. The physiological responses 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 lose self-esteem and self-confidence which leads to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. At worst, such a person may even end up committing suicide.

(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.

★ Exercise 2

Read the following paragraph and, after identifying the Themes, decide what is the author's focus.

Soap operas and special sporting events such as the Olympics are the most generally popular TV shows in Britain. Quiz shows are another popular program, mainly among women and younger people while sport dominates the viewing habits of male viewers. Special sports programs, however, such as the Olympics, are enjoyed by all groups of people, as are soap operas such as Dallas. The least popular shows, on the other hand, are arts and music

programs, while current affairs is disliked by women and younger viewers. The News is also disliked by this last group, which prefers dramas and police shows.

In the next part of this exercise, you are to rewrite this paragraph so that the focus is changed. To help you prepare for this writing exercise, fill out the following table based on the information given in the passage. Then rewrite the passage focussing on the viewers.

	Television Viewers			
	Men	Women	Young People	All groups
Popular programs				
Unpopular programs				

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

★ Exercise 3

The following extracts were from an undergraduate essay which was written in response to this question:

"Why did anatomists in Europe doubt the evidence of their own eyes?"

Critically evaluate whether this piece of writing is answering the question very effectively. To help you do this, notice the Theme choices and determine whether they focus on giving an appropriate answer.

Galen, a Greek physician of the Roman period, studied and researched into anatomy. **He** only dissected animals; **people** believed at that time that **it** was sacrilegious to dissect human beings. **His views** were commonly accepted **and men** did no further research for over a millennium. **No one** was allowed to challenge Galen's ideas.

Early writers in the 13th century followed Galenic dictates preserved in the Moorish literature. **They** actually preferred it to the testimony of their own eyes. **When they** found evidence which differed from the old theory, **they** assumed that they must be dissecting an abnormal body. **They** could not preserve the bodies and **no one** checked these differences.

★ ★ Before doing the next exercise check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

★ Exercise 4

The next piece is a rewritten version of the answer you read in the previous exercise. When you read this answer, underline the Themes to help you see what this writer's focus is. Then decide whether this is a more appropriate answer to the question.

Galen's anatomical discussions were based solely on dissections of animals and his descriptions were therefore often wrong. However acceptance of Galen's views on human anatomy were so complete that for hundreds of years no further research into human anatomy was undertaken. The overwhelming respect in which Galen was held by the medical profession was the most important factor which prevented anatomists from checking his descriptions against empirical evidence from human dissection. This reverence for Galen's work led anatomists in Medieval Europe to see contradictory evidence from their dissections as coming from abnormal bodies. Unwillingness to challenge Galen was the key factor which caused anatomists to doubt the evidence of their eyes, even though there were practical reasons why careful cross checking of evidence was difficult at that time.

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

2.0 Developing Information across Sentences

The choices that you make of what information to put into Theme position are very important in focussing on the message you want to get across. But this is not the whole story. What you choose to put in the Theme position will influence what you put in the rest of the sentence, that is, in the New position. The combination of what goes into Theme and what goes into New is very important in developing your ideas from one sentence to the next, and therefore in building up the **cohesion** of your writing.

Each piece of writing will have its own pattern of Theme and New choices, but there are some common patterns which we can see by using arrows to show the relationship between Themes and News. In these examples, all the Themes are in bold.

Example 1

Here the Theme of the first sentence is picked up again in the Theme of the second sentence, and so on.

Paragraph (with Theme in bold)	Theme - New pattern
First year students appear overall to be quite well-informed about AIDS.	THEME → NEW ↓
Their awareness is significantly higher than among students even 2-3 years ago.	THEME → NEW ↓
Their behaviour, however, is quite disconcerting.	THEME → NEW ↓
A number of them, while aware of the risk of AIDS, still continue to engage in high-risk sexual behaviour.	THEME → NEW

Example 2

Here the New of one sentence becomes the Theme of the next sentence, and so on.

Paragraph (with Theme in bold)	Theme - New pattern
Since 1880 the global temperature has risen by 0.4c.	THEME → NEW ↓
If the global temperature were to increase by 5c the polar caps would start to melt.	THEME → NEW ↙
The melting of the polar ice caps would lead to an increase in the water levels.	THEME → NEW ↙
If the water levels were to increase	THEME → NEW

Example 3

Here the New of one sentence is picked up in the Themes of several following sentences.

Paragraph (with Theme in bold)	Theme - New pattern
The four responses are: the emotional level the behavioural level, the physiological level, and the cognitive level.	THEME → NEW ↓
The emotional responses to stress are sadness, depression, anger, irritation and frustration.	THEME → NEW ↙
The behavioural responses are poor concentration, forgetfulness, poor interpersonal relations, and lowered productivity.	THEME → NEW ↙
The physiological responses consist of bodily tensions, which may lead to headaches, backaches, stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, and even killer diseases.	THEME → NEW ↙
At the cognitive level one may lose self-esteem and self-confidence which leads to feelings of helplessness.	THEME → NEW

If we change the pattern of the information, we change the focus, and can sometimes make the writing very difficult to understand. Sometimes, it can be difficult to see how each new point being made relates to the next point, because the New piece of information is not picked up at the beginning of the following sentence.

Example 4

Here is an example of 'uncohesive' writing, in which each sentence begins with a new piece of information, rather than picking up the piece of information already given in the sentence before.

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), has no cure and can have a fatal prognosis. Public health education is the best means of combating this disease. College and University students are especially likely to benefit from AIDS education and behavioural change. The transition from high school to university frequently involves movement from family to independent living, allowing for a variety of changes in social and sexual behaviour that place young adults at risk for AIDS.

Example 5

Here is the same paragraph rewritten to be more cohesive. The New part of the sentences is picked up at the beginning of the following sentence, i.e. in the Theme.

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), has no cure and can have a fatal prognosis. The disease is best combated through public health education. Such education is especially beneficial for college and university students because they need to undergo behavioural change. These students, in making the transition from high school to university, a transition frequently involving movement from family to independent living, are placed at risk for AIDS because of the variety of changes in their social and sexual behaviour.

★ Exercise 5

Read the following text, and underline the sentence Themes. Then draw arrows to show where each Theme comes from, i.e. from another Theme or from a New.

The need for effective planning of rural lands is now recognised throughout the developed world.

Examples of countries introducing programmes in recent years to protect agricultural lands include the USA, Japan, the UK, Germany and Canada.

The world's dominant food producer, the US had now introduced a broad range of measures to curb the conversion of agricultural lands to other uses.

These measures are in recognition of the fact that agricultural land in that nation is being lost at the rate of 102 million hectares per year (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1981).

A continuation of this trend would mean that all prime farm land of Florida, presently producing 50% of the world's grapefruit and 25% of the world's oranges, would be lost by the year 2000.

By the same time, the states of Virginia and California would lose about one-fifth of the best of their agricultural land (Brown, 1978).

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

Unit 2: Answer Key to Exercises

★ ★ Exercise 1: Answer

Stress is a term adopted from engineering evidence 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 pressure, stress is called the "disease of civilisation". **Phillip Zimbardo**, traces four interrelated levels at which we react to the pressure 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** are poor concentration, forgetfulness, poor interpersonal relations, and lowered productivity. **The physiological responses** 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 lose self-esteem and self-confidence which leads to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. **At worst, such a person** may even end up committing suicide.

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

This paragraph has "stress" or something related to stress in Theme position in almost every sentence. The paragraph is serving the purpose of defining and explaining stress, through setting up a classification system for understanding stress.

★ ★ Exercise 2: Answer

Soap operas and special sporting events such as the Olympics are the most generally popular TV shows in Britain. **Quiz shows** are another popular program, mainly among women and younger people while sport dominates the viewing habits of male viewers. **Special sports programs**, however, such as the Olympics, are enjoyed by all groups of people, as are soap operas such as Dallas. **The least popular shows**, on the other hand, are arts and music programmes, while **current affairs** is disliked by women and younger viewers. **The News** is also disliked by this last group, which prefers dramas and police shows.

	Television Viewers			
	Men	Women	Young People	All groups
Popular programs	sport	quiz shows	quiz shows dramas police shows	soap operas special sporting events
Unpopular programs		current affairs	current affairs news	arts and music

In this paragraph, the author is focussing on the different categories of television programs. Here is a suggested way of rewriting the paragraph to focus on the television viewers (Themes in bold).

British television viewers generally enjoy soap operas and special sporting events. **Women and younger people** tend to watch quiz shows, while male viewers prefer sport. **All groups of people** enjoy special sports programmes as well as soap operas like "Dallas". **Only a**

minority of viewers tend to watch arts and music programs while **women and younger viewers** dislike current affairs programs. **This last group** also dislikes the news and prefers drama and police shows.

★ ★ Exercise 3: Answer

This extract focuses on Galen and what he did, as well as the people of the time and what they believed. Therefore, it does not provide an appropriate answer to the question, which asks:

Why did anatomists in Europe doubt the evidence of their own eyes?

★ ★ Exercise 4: Answer

Galen's anatomical discussions were based solely on dissections of animals and his descriptions were therefore often wrong. **However, acceptance of Galen's views on human anatomy** were so complete that for hundreds of years no further research into human anatomy was undertaken. **The overwhelming respect in which Galen was held by the medical profession** was the most important factor which prevented anatomists from checking his descriptions against empirical evidence from human dissection. **This reverence for Galen's work** led anatomists in Medieval Europe to see contradictory evidence from their dissections as coming from abnormal bodies. **Unwillingness to challenge Galen** was the key factor which caused anatomists to doubt the evidence of their eyes, even though there were practical reasons why careful cross checking of evidence was difficult at that time.

Notice that in each Theme there is a word which sums up the attitudes that people had towards Galen's work - acceptance, respect, reverence, unwillingness to challenge. These words capture the reasons why people doubted the evidence of their own eyes, and therefore the extract is a very appropriate answer to the question.

★ ★ Exercise 5: Answer

The need for effective planning of rural lands is now recognised throughout the developed world.

Examples of countries introducing programs in recent years to protect agricultural lands include the USA, Japan, the UK, Germany and Canada.

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