

## **Week 4: Text Cohesion: Discourse markers**

### **Cohesion vs Coherence**

Very briefly, a text is **cohesive** if its elements are linked together, and **coherent** if it makes sense. These are not necessarily the same thing. That is, a text may be cohesive (i.e. linked together), but incoherent (i.e. meaningless). Here is one such text:

I am a teacher. The teacher was late for class. Class rhymes with grass. The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. But it wasn't.

Each sentence is notionally linked to the one that precedes it, using both lexical and grammatical means, but the text is ultimately senseless.

The exact relationship between cohesion and coherence is a matter of some contention. While it is true that a sequence of unlinked utterances **can** make sense, it is often the case that some form of linking, e.g. with discourse markers such as 'and', 'but' and 'so' (or the more formal variants 'moreover', 'however' and 'consequently') makes it easier for the reader (or listener) to process and to make sense of what they read (or hear).

**Nevertheless**, a text which is poorly organised is not going to be made more coherent simply by 'peppering it' with discourse markers. The following text is an example of a text that is overloaded with discourse markers. It is somewhat typical of the kind of texts that many students produce as a result of an over-emphasis on linking devices at the expense of other ways of making texts cohesive, of which probably the most important is the careful use of vocabulary.

Louie rushed and got ready for work, **but**, when he went out the door, he saw the snowstorm was very heavy. **Therefore**, he decided not to go to work. **Then**, he sat down to enjoy his newspaper. **However**, he realized his boss might get angry **because** he did not go to the office. **Finally**, he made another decision, that he must go to work. **So**, he went out the door and walked to the bus stop.

**Put simply** then: cohesion is a formal feature of texts (it gives them their *texture*), while coherence is "in the eye of the beholder" - that is to say, it is the extent to which the reader (or listener) is able to infer the writer's (or speaker's) communicative intentions. Thus, cohesion is objectively verifiable (you can actually see or hear it), while coherence is more subjective. A text may be coherent to you, but incoherent to me.

Adapted from: <http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?docId=154867>

Cohesion refers to 'the linguistic elements that help to make a discourse semantically coherent'. The words and phrases used to achieve cohesion are often referred to as discourse markers (also known as *cohesive devices*, *linkers*, *connectors*, *transition signals*, and *signposts*).

**Task 1: Working in a small group, underline/highlight the discourse markers in the sentences below before moving on to discuss their function.**

- a. Furthermore, child mortality rates must be examined.
- b. Prices are rising worldwide, thus encouraging investment.
- c. Due to the high rate of inflation, interest rates were raised.

d. Finally, the role of the computer in education will be discussed.

e. Various writers have examined this issue, for instance, Van Exel (2000).

f. Although this study concentrates mainly on students from abroad, ....

It is impossible, in the time available, to cover all the discourse markers in English, so, for the rest of the session, we will be focusing on those you might find the most useful.

**Task 2: The following text is not easy to understand. That is because the discourse markers have been removed! Add appropriate discourse markers so that the text makes sense! I suggest you work in small groups.**

There are two reasons for supporting pure scientific research. .... (1), it satisfies humans' natural curiosity about the universe in which we live. .... (2), technological advances that followed on from pure scientific research have led to improvement in our lives. .... (3), the non-stick coating on saucepans has made washing the dishes so much easier. .... (4), improved aeroplane materials have made flying faster, quieter and cheaper. .... (5), we should be grateful for pure scientific research.

Exploration of space has resulted in improved understanding about weather systems on other planets and moons in our solar system. .... , (6) we have an improved understanding of the earth's weather systems ..... (7) the consequences of future changes such as global warming.

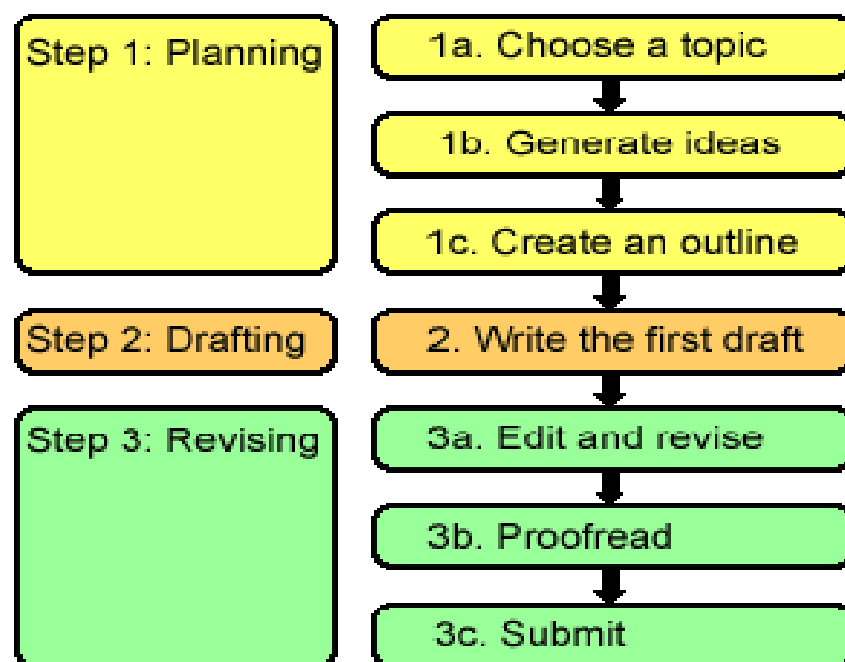
It is so easy for scientific advances to cause problems. .... (8), nuclear energy sounded wonderful when it was first developed, ..... (9) of its expected low cost ..... (10) lack of pollution. Safety was a concern and was taken seriously, ..... (11) careful precautions were usually taken, and in most cases these did actually result in a low chance of an accident. .... (12), nothing is perfect, including safety systems, and when problems do happen, the consequences are extremely serious. .... (13), although actual operation of a nuclear reactor produces little visible pollution, disposal of the radioactive materials that are produced is extremely difficult and expensive and, ..... (14), nuclear power is now considered too expensive in many countries. .... (15), many governments have stopped planning to build more nuclear reactors. This example clearly shows that the miracle of yesterday may become the disaster of tomorrow. Not every scientific advance has the expected result

**Task 3: Read through the text again, this time categorising the discourse markers according to function. 'Therefore', for example, is used to express 'reason/result/cause and effect'. Also, what can you say about the position of the discourse marker in the sentence?**

**Task 4: How would you classify the discourse markers 'firstly' and 'secondly' in the first paragraph? In the box below, compile a list of other discourse markers that belong to the same category.**

Classification: .....
Discourse markers:

**Task 5: (Homework task?) - Write a brief paragraph using sequence discourse markers, describing the 'writing an essay' flowchart below.**



**Task 6: What is the function of the following short text? Highlight/Underline all the discourse markers, including those associated with the specific function of the text.**

French and American business managers have decidedly different management styles. French meetings, for example, are long and rambling and rarely end on time. Furthermore, meetings often end without closure. Americans, on the other hand, make an effort to start and stop a meeting on time, and American business meetings typically end with decisions and action plans. Another difference involves documentation. Americans adore documentation; they have a procedure manual for everything. The French, in contrast, think this is childish. French managers find it difficult to stick to a schedule, but American managers are intolerant of delays. In addition, the French prefer to work alone, whereas Americans like to work in teams. Another major difference in management style is that in French companies, authority comes from the top; French managers do not share information with subordinates and make decisions with little participation by employees beneath them. In American companies, however, top managers share information and frequently solicit input from subordinates.

**Task 7: Read the following two paragraphs. What is their function? Underline/Highlight all the discourse markers, especially those associated with the main function of the texts.**

### PCs versus Macs

#### Paragraph 1

If you are planning to buy a personal computer, you should know some of the basic similarities and differences between PCs and Macs. First of all, both PCs and Macs are composed of the same elements: a CPU, the electronic circuitry to run the computer; memory (hard and/or floppy disk drives) for storing information; five input devices such as a keyboard or mouse for putting information into the computer; and output devices such as a monitor, printer, and audio speakers for conveying information. They also have the same uses: PCs are used to communicate on computer networks, to write (with the help of word processing and desktop publishing software), to track finances, and to play games. Macs are likewise used to communicate, write, calculate, and entertain.



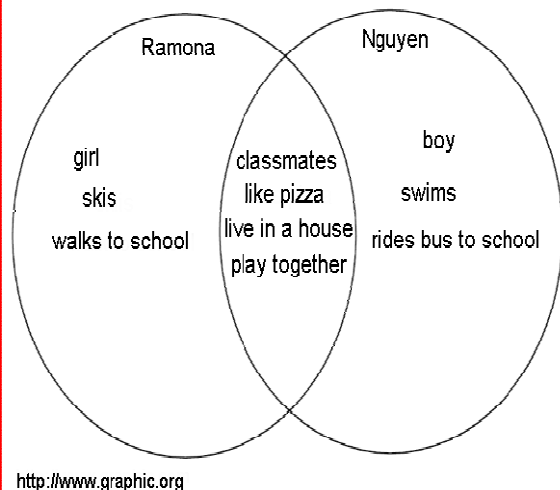
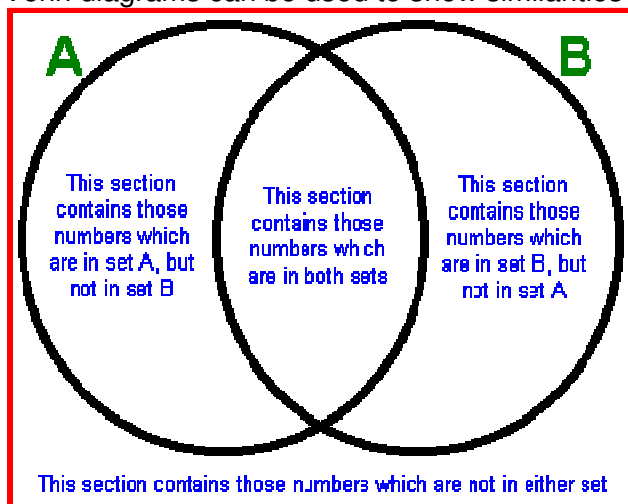
#### Paragraph 2

There are some differences, however. Whereas you will find more PCs in business offices, you will find more Macs in classrooms. Although Macs are the computers of choice of people who do a lot of art and graphic design in their work, PCs seem to be the choice of people who do a lot of 'number crunching'. Finally, there is a difference in the availability of software, vendors, and service for the two computers. In general, there is a lot of PC-compatible software, but relatively little Mac software. Furthermore, for a Mac, you must purchase your machine and get service from a Macintosh-authorized dealer, whereas many different computer stores sell and service PCs.

Source: Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. (1999). *Writing Academic English, Third edition*. White Plains NY: Pearson education

### Venn diagrams

Venn diagrams can be used to show similarities and differences between two or more items.



### Task 8: Cause and effect (homework task?)

#### Working with a-j below...

**Step 1** Decide which sentence in each item is a cause and which is an effect. Write 'C' for cause and 'E' for effect next to each sentence.

**Step 2** Combine the sentences in each item into a new sentence that shows a cause and effect relationship. Use a different structure word or phrase in each new sentence.

#### Example

**Effect (E)** The death rate among women from lung cancer is increasing.

**Cause (C)** Women are smoking more.

→ **Because** women are smoking more their death rate from lung cancer is increasing.

**or**

The increase in the death rate of women from lung cancer is the **consequence/result of** their smoking more.

#### (See separate sheet for specific cause and effect language)

- a. Cancer is increasing in industrialized nations.  
Air pollution and the use of chemicals in food are increasing in these countries
- b. The saltiest water is found at the bottom of the ocean.  
Salt water, being denser than fresh water, sinks.
- c. Heat energy is carried by electrons.  
Metals have many free-moving electrons.  
Metals are good conductors of heat.
- d. Some businesses have flexible working hours.  
Productivity has increased.  
Absenteeism has declined.
- e. Radiation escaped into the atmosphere.  
The Chernobyl nuclear power plant had no confinement shell.
- f. Operators at the Chernobyl plant disregarded safety rules.  
The nuclear reactor underwent a meltdown.
- g. During a weather phenomenon known as El Nino, a mass of warm water flows eastward across the Pacific Ocean towards South America.  
The temperature of the water off the coast of Peru rises as much as 10 degrees fahrenheit.

- h. Weather around the world changes.  
During an El Nino, the jet stream blows in a different pattern.
  
- i. Heavy rains fall in some areas of the world.  
Devastating floods and mudslides happen.
  
- j. Thousands of people suffer starvation.  
Drought happens in other parts of the world.

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