

COHERENCE & TRANSITIONS

*Francesca Gacho, Graduate Writing Coach
fgacho@usc.edu / <http://cmgtwriting.uscannenberg.org>*

Workshop Goals

- Recognize the strategies that good writers use to create flow and coherence.
- Use these strategies to increase flow, coherence and readability in your writing.

Coherence & Transitions

- What are they? What's the difference?
 - **Coherence:** In writing, this generally refers to the entire text's ability to give the reader a sense of a smooth *flow* of information (sentences or ideas).
 - **Transitions:** This refers to words or phrases that help establish logical connections between sentences, paragraphs, and sections of your texts.
- Why do we need them?
 - Particularly in academic writing, the reader expects the text to build on a central idea that show consistent relationships between ideas. As a writer, then, you'll need to make sure that the reader understands why every piece of information you've given them is relevant to your point.

Three Key Strategies to Create Coherence

1. Repeat key words and forms of words.
2. Use the old-to-new information flow or pattern.
3. Use signal words and transitions strategically.

Strategy 1: Repeat key words and forms of words.

Research has shown that **caffeine** reduces **sleepiness** and can lead to better academic performance. Despite its effectiveness in counteracting **sleepiness**, **caffeine** can have a negative impact on subsequent **sleep**, which for many students may already be compromised. Specifically, **caffeinated** beverages consumed near bedtime ... can prolong **sleep** onset and reduce **sleep** efficiency and depth, thus affecting both **sleep** quality and duration. Most of the research on how **caffeine** affects **sleepiness** and alertness has focused on coffee or nudoze pills. However, a new kind of **caffeinated** drink has become increasingly popular, namely functional energy drinks

Student Sample of Strategy 1

In order to better create and implement a successful marketing plan for the restaurant industry, researchers have also examined the increasing impact of **social network sites** on **consumer behavior** (Miles 2014; Richards & Tiwari, 2014). In recent years, the use of online media, particularly **social networking sites**, has produced significant changes in **consumer behavior**, and restaurateurs have increasingly turned to **social media** for their marketing strategy (Gunden, 2017). These **online platforms** such as Yelp, Facebook, and Instagram—whether connecting with peers or unknown users—provide customers with tools that allow them to share their dining experiences and, in turn, have revolutionized the restaurant industry (Richards & Tiwari, 2014; Hosie, 2017). For example, before customers select a place to dine out, they check not only a restaurant’s web page, but also its Instagram, both to ascertain what a certain dish looks like and to ensure that it is aesthetic and “Instagrammable” (Hosie, 2017).

Strategy 2: Use the Old- to-New Information Pattern

- Definition of the old-new information pattern
 - The old-new information pattern is a method for organizing sentences, paragraphs and papers.
 - This method involves placing old information (information that the reader already has some familiarity with) at the beginning of the sentence (before the verb) and placing new information after the verb.
 - Using this method, the flow of ideas resembles links in a chain.

*Strategy #2:
Example of
the Old-to-
New
Information
Pattern*

The Operation of a Nuclear Power Plant

A nuclear power plant (**OLD**) contains a nuclear reactor that uses controlled nuclear fission to produce electricity (**NEW**). The reactor (**OLD**) consists of fuel rods alternating with control rods inside a large container called a reactor core (**NEW**). The fuel rods (**OLD**) contain radioactive fuel (**NEW**) and the control rods (**OLD**) contain neutron-absorbing substances (**NEW**)...

Student Sample of Strategy 2

Online platforms **(OLD)** are growing in popularity in the corporate communication sector due to the rising demand for companies to engage their stakeholders **(NEW)**. European regulators are pushing for more active shareholder engagement **(OLD)** to improve corporate governance (Hoffmann & Aeschlimann, 2017) **(NEW)**. As a consequence of this push **(OLD)**, online platforms in IR are gaining momentum in the European market **(NEW)**. Unlike social media, these platforms **(OLD)** are proprietary, closed and solely for the interaction between a corporation and its shareholders **(NEW)**. Through the platform **(OLD)**, shareholders can access data, information, converse with the corporation, post in forums, and vote online **(NEW)**.

Is the Old-to-New Pattern Used?

Research has shown that caffeine reduces sleepiness and can lead to better academic performance. Despite its effectiveness in counteracting sleepiness, caffeine can have a negative impact on subsequent sleep, which for many students may already be compromised. Specifically, caffeinated beverages consumed near bedtime ... can prolong sleep onset and reduce sleep efficiency and depth, thus affecting both sleep quality and duration. Most of the research on how caffeine affects sleepiness and alertness has focused on coffee or no-dose pills. However, a new kind of caffeinated drink has become increasingly popular, namely functional energy drinks.

Which Version is Easier to Read? Why?

Version One

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists exploring the nature of black holes in space. The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole.

Version Two

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists exploring the nature of black holes in space. A black hole is created by the collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble.

Two Options for Old-to- New Structure

- 1. The old information comes from the previous sentence.**
 - Bioremediation is the use of microorganisms to remove contaminants from the environment. **This process** is widely considered as an effective remediation technology ...
- 2. The old information comes from the topic sentence.**
 - The literature on compensation is based on three theories: reinforcement theory, expectancy theory and equity theory. **Reinforcement theory** (Skinner, 1938) suggests that individuals perform well if they receive an award today. **Expectancy theory** (Vroom, 1964) states that individuals perform well today if they are expecting a future reward. **Equity theory** ...

Strategy 3: Use Signal Words and Transitions Strategically

- Transitions allow you to establish **continuity** in your writing.
 - Time sequence
 - Place/location
 - Addition
 - Emphasis
 - Concession to another point
 - Return to a point
 - Give an example
 - Provide a reason
 - Contrast
 - Conclusion

For a quick list, visit University of Wisconsin-Madison's *The Writer's Handbook* "Using Transitions" page:
<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/Transitions.html>

*Francesca Gacho, Graduate Writing
Coach, fgacho@usc.edu*

*A Series of
Paragraph
Openers from
Manuel G.
Velasquez's
Business
Ethics (2011)*

1. *How well* does a free monopoly market succeed in achieving the moral values that characterize competitive free markets? Not well.
2. The *most obvious failure* of monopoly markets lies in the high prices.
3. A monopoly market *also* results in a decline in the efficiency with which it allocates and distributes goods.
4. *First*, the monopoly allows resources to be used in ways that will produce shortages...
5. *Second*, monopoly markets do not encourage suppliers...
6. *Third*, a monopoly market allows the seller to introduce price differentials...
7. Monopoly markets *also* embody restrictions...
8. A monopoly market, *then*, is the one that deviates from the ideals of capitalist justice...

Signal Phrases & Signposting

- **Signposting helps readers locate *parts* of the text.**
 - Summary reminder phrases tell your reader you're about to summarize something from a source
- **The author claims that...**
- **Stolitz (2012) argues...**
 - Evidence markers such as “for example,” or “in the case of...” signals to your reader that you will introduce evidence.
 - Subheadings are great opportunities to establish transitions or continuity.
- **Be consistent. Follow parallel structures.**
- **Some genres of writing work well with subheadings; others do not.**
 - Conjunctions

Examples of Signposting

In order to better create and implement a successful marketing plan for the restaurant industry, researchers have **also** examined the increasing impact of social network sites on consumer behavior (Miles 2014; Richards & Tiwari, 2014). **In recent years**, the use of online media, particularly social networking sites, has produced significant changes in consumer behavior, and restaurateurs have increasingly turned to social media for their marketing strategy (Gunden, 2017). **These online platforms such as** Yelp, Facebook, and Instagram—whether connecting with peers or unknown users—provide customers with tools that allow them to share their dining experiences **and, in turn**, have revolutionized the restaurant industry (Richards & Tiwari, 2014; Hosie, 2017). **For example**, before customers select a place to dine out, they check not only a restaurant’s web page, but also its Instagram, both to ascertain what a certain dish looks like and to ensure that it is aesthetic and “Instagrammable” (Hosie, 2017).

Combine Signal Words with the Old-to- New Pattern

- For **this reason** ...
- For (all) **these reasons** ...
- As a result of this/these *plus noun* ... (**As a result of this ruling** ...)
- Because of this/these *plus noun* ... (**Because of these recent developments**)
- Due to this/these *plus noun* ... (**Due to this change**)
- Despite/in spite of this/these *plus noun* (**Despite this upward trend in the average income of Canadians, ...**)
- Rather than/instead of *plus noun/gerund* ... (**Rather than allowing water to escape from the posterior valves, Minelli's model ...**)

Practice:

*Use a signal word
or phrase with
“this/these +
noun”*

X The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery because most of the eye tissue is transparent. The frequency and focus of the beam can be adjusted according to the absorption of the tissue.

✓ The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery since most of the eye tissue is **transparent. Because of this transparency,** the frequency and focus of the beam can be adjusted according to the absorption of the tissue

Additional Strategies: Achieving Coherence

- Use pronouns to link sentences.
 - Link or connect sentences by referring to preceding nouns and pronouns. They also help eliminate wordiness and repetition.
 - Mr. Thompson agreed to meet with the members of the worker’s union before **he** signed the contract. **He** was interested in hearing **their** concerns about the new insurance plan.
- Use synonyms to link ideas and create variety.*
 - Provide alternative word choices
 - **Teenagers** face an enormous amount of peer pressure from friends and schoolmates. **As a result**, many **young adults** are exhibiting signs of sever stress at an early age.

Additional Strategies

- Use Parallel Structure
 - Parallelism refers to the use of matching words, phrases, clauses, or sentence structures to express similar ideas.
 - Usually, the children spend the summer weekends **playing** ball in the park, **swimming** in the neighbor's pool, **eating** ice cream under the tree, or **camping in the backyard**.
 - At the museum, the class **attended a lecture where the speaker demonstrated** how the Native Americans made bows and arrows. They also **attended a workshop where a sword smith demonstrated** how the Vikings crafted swords.

***PRACTICE:**
Apply one of
these three
key
strategies to
your best
paragraph*

1. Repeat key words and forms of words.
2. Use the old-to-new information flow or pattern.
3. Use signal words and transitions strategically.

Works Consulted

Bailey, S. (2015). *Academic Writing for International Graduate Students*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Garner, B. A. (2012). *HBR Guide to Better Business Writing*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

McWhinney, H. (2017). "Weaving Ideas Together: Flow and Coherence in Your Writing." University of Saskatchewan Graduate Writing Help.

<http://library.usask.ca/studentlearning>

Southeastern Writing Center. (2011). "Coherence." https://www.southeastern.edu/acad_research/programs/writing_center/handouts/pdf_handouts/coherence.pdf

Swales, J.M. & Feak, C.B. (2012). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*. 3rd ed. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

University of Wisconsin-Madison. (2017). "Using Transitions." *The Writer's Handbook*.

<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/Transitions.htm>

!