



Cohesive writing

1. Conjunction: linking words

What is cohesive writing?

Cohesive writing is writing which holds together well. It is easy to follow because it uses language effectively to guide the reader.

In English cohesion is achieved in a number of ways:

- Firstly, the **logical relationships** between ideas are stated so that the reader can easily understand the relationship between the parts of a text. The logical relationships between clauses, between sentences, and between paragraphs can be expressed by conjunctions (*and, or, because, so* etc.), or they can be expressed by prepositional phrases (*after that, in contrast* etc.) or adverbs (*thus, alternatively* etc.).
- Secondly, **reference** is used to introduce the nouns in a text and to keep track of them. For example, instead of repeating the word *nouns* in our last sentence, we used the pronoun *them* to refer to *nouns*. This means you as the reader had to work out what *them* referred to. This process of 'tracking' items contributes to the overall cohesion of a text.
- Thirdly, words are selected that go together and relate to each other in some way. For example, a nursing text about the health of an expectant mother is likely to include words such as *rest, nutrition, and blood pressure*. In a management text we might expect terms such as *teams, cooperation, outcomes* etc. These expectancy relations, words which go together, create **lexical cohesion** (*lexis* = words).
- Finally, in a well written text there is logical progression to the development of the text. New information is presented in a way which does not disrupt the flow of the text and its meaning. One way to achieve this is to write well structured paragraphs.

Each of these aspects will be explored in this cohesive writing module.

Conjunction: establishing the logical relations

In writing, we present ideas which relate to each other in a logical way. The relationship may be causal (cause and effect, for example *because, so, as a result*), temporal (a sequence in time, for example, *next, then, first*), contrastive (one thing as opposed to another, for example, *however, on the other hand*), or simply additive (one thing plus another, for example, *and, in addition, moreover*).

Conjunction and *conjunctions*

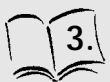
Conjunction refers to how a writer creates and expresses the logical relationships between the parts of a text (Eggins, 1994, p. 105). Conjunction relies on words called *conjunctions*, which are the words we use to join clauses¹ together. In other words, they are the words which express the logical relationship.



1. Conjunction: linking words



2. Reference: tracing threads



3. Lexical cohesion: words that go together



4. Paragraph development

Learning objectives

This module will help you to:

- understand the concept of cohesive writing
- be familiar with the main language tools which create cohesion in writing. These are:
 - conjunction (*and, but, etc.*)
 - reference (*the people – they, etc.*)
 - lexical cohesion (*words that go together*)
 - paragraph development
- use these tools to create writing that flows and guides the reader



For example:

Justice implies a sense of equality for all, **and** it implies an acceptance of a standard that applies to the whole community.

In this sentence the second clause beginning with the conjunction **and** adds extra information to the first clause. In the next example, the information in the second clause (starting with **but**) doesn't add information, rather the new information serves to concede a point which is in contrast to information in the first clause.

Legal aid may not provide for total equality due to means testing, lack of funding and the nature of differing court hearings, **but** it remains a well established feature of Australia's legal system.

Here the conjunction **but** functions to contrast the information in the second clause with the information in the first.

The different classes of conjunctions and their functions

In addition to conjunctions that join clauses together, there are words that create cohesion between sentences, and also between two or several paragraphs: for example, *in other words*, *however*, *consequently*. These words can be:

- prepositional phrases (*on the contrary*, *in spite of*);
- a preposition introducing a noun phrase (*besides the suitable conditions*);
- a preposition introducing an 'ing' verb (*besides finding suitable conditions*); adverbs (*alternatively*);

Conjunctions and grammatical errors in student writing

Establishing the correct logical relationship between the parts of your text contributes to the cohesiveness of your writing. It also helps you avoid a common grammatical error in student academic writing: that of 'run-on' sentences. These are sentences which are generally incorrectly punctuated. The result is a series of sentences 'run' together mostly with commas.

An example of a run-on sentence:

As early as March 1810 Macquarie put in a request to the colonial office to set up a bank, the bank of New South Wales did not open for business until April 1817. (*the run-on sentence is underlined*)

corrected sentence using a co-ordinating conjunction:

As early as March 1810 Macquarie put in a request to the colonial office to set up a bank, **but** the bank of New South Wales did not open for business until April 1817.

alternative correction with *however*. Note the different punctuation.

As early as March 1810 Macquarie put in a request to the colonial office to set up a bank. **However**, the bank of New South Wales did not open for business until April 1817.

In this sentence there are two abstractions (the abstract nouns *the decision*, and *the need*), and the causal relation is expressed by the verb *was + due to*. Also, it is worth noting that the final example doesn't mention *the British*: the focus has shifted from the people who *decided* and *needed*, to the abstract things *the decision* and *the need*.

In spoken language conjunctions are mostly used to join clauses, while in written language conjunctions are typically used between sentences. In the case of expressing reasoning or cause, in written language, and particularly academic language, this is often expressed by verbs or nouns within a clause. However, this is not to say that you shouldn't use co-ordinating conjunctions (words like *and*, *but*, *or*, *so*) to join sentences when writing at university. Our point is that while it is important to use connectives to write cohesively, overuse of conjunctions (to join clauses) can make your writing sound like spoken language rather than written. As you can see from the above examples the logical relation can be established through other classes of words such as prepositions and verbs.

Conjunction and the structure of your written assignments

Another important point about conjunction in writing is that connectives are not only used to establish the logical relations between the information in a text, but they are also useful to signal the text's overall structure and the different stages of your text, that is, the text's **rhetorical organisation**. Let's look at an example to understand the different, but related functions of connectives.

Diana was kept very busy. First, she had to donate blood. Next, she caught the plane to Geneva. Finally, she attended the conference.

Diana is a very generous person. First, she donates blood regularly. Next, she's involved in charity work. Finally, she keeps an open house.

(example from Eggins, 1994, pp. 107-108)

In the first example, the three connectives *first*, *next*, *finally* refer to a sequence of events, whereas in the second example the conjunctions help the speaker/writer to organise the information rhetorically (as you are required to do in your essays).

Task 1.3 Practising using different classes of connectives (brain teaser!)

In each sentence the conjunctions are written in italics. Replace the conjunction in italics with the word in bold at the end of the sentence. To do this you may also need to change some other aspects of the sentence.⁶

Note: this task is more challenging than previous tasks, as it involves you manipulating language.

- Students misbehave *because* they have problems with life at school.⁷ **[caused]**
Note: You will need to make *students misbehave* and *they have problems with life at school* noun phrases, that is *student misbehaviour*, and *the students' problems with life at school*

Student misbehaviour

Learning development

2. CSIRO will plan comprehensively and *thereby* identify training needs.⁸ **[will result in].** **Note:** Start the sentence with *CSIRO's comprehensive planning*, and make *identify* a noun (*identification*)

3. CSIRO will plan comprehensively and *thereby* identify training needs. **[through]** **Note:** in this sentence ask yourself the question “*How will CSIRO identify training needs?*” Also *comprehensively* will need to appear as the adjective *comprehensive*.

4. CSIRO will plan comprehensively and *thereby* identify training needs. **[is the way]** **Note:** start sentence with *Comprehensive planning*

Check the key at the end of this unit for your answers.

Conjunction is only one aspect of cohesive writing. If you would like more information on cohesion, see the units on **Reference**, **Lexical cohesion**, and **Paragraph development**.

Key

1.1 Identifying the logical relations

The logical relations are expressed by the connectives in bold:

In conclusion, the physical health of the mother will greatly influence the development of the foetus. In the majority of cases, the factors influencing the mother's health, **such as** smoking, malnutrition, drugs and diseases, are closely related, **so that** it becomes difficult for researchers to determine which factor, and to what extent that factor is responsible for the adverse effects on the development of the foetus. **However**, a great deal of the research associated with prenatal development does indicate that the main influences on the environment and development of the foetus are from controllable causes.

Note: if you selected other connectives, check with the table of connectives that those you selected express the same logical relation as the connectives above.

1.2 Comparing the logical relations in two texts

The connectives for each text are written in the right hand column.

Text A	type of logical relation
<p>It can be argued that all children in Australia have the right to be educated in their mother tongue. Many children in the past have spent months or years in school without understanding lessons. In fact, many migrant children are failing in our education system due to the lack of bilingual education programmes. Furthermore, the U.N report on language and education states that children who* become literate in their own language have the best chance of educational success. Additionally, recent discussion concerning the latest figures on university entrance indicate that migrant students perform more poorly than native English speakers at present. State governments should therefore address this issue by setting up bilingual education programmes for all NESB migrant children. An example of the success of such programmes is the 'two-way' system currently in place in parts of the Northern Territory.</p>	<p><i>clarifying</i></p> <p><i>causative;</i> <i>additive</i></p> <p><i>additive</i></p> <p><i>conclusion</i></p> <p><i>exemplifying</i></p>
Text B	type of logical relation
<p>The gradual migration of life from the ocean to the land was another major step that made many advances possible. Eventually, plants and animals divided into males and females and possibilities increased for developing new and varied species. To date, more than 400 000 species of plants and 1 200 000 species of animals have developed. Gradually, the senses of sight and hearing improved in animals and brains grew and developed. Finally, intelligence progressed, leading to the development of human beings.</p>	<p><i>these connectives sequence what happened (chronological order)</i></p>

* In our explanation section we identified *who* as a potential connective which **adds** information. However, here *children who become literate in their own language* is a complex noun, so *who* defines which children we are talking about. On the other hand *who* in the clause, *children, who can learn to read easily while they are young*, **adds** extra information about children. It is therefore functionally different to the *who* in text a.

In what ways are the logical relations in texts a) and b) different? Why might this be?

You may have suggested that the logical relationships in these texts are different because they are different types of texts, fulfilling different functions. If you did, you would be correct! The first is part of an essay which is aiming to put forward an argument. It therefore uses the logic of addition, causation and exemplification. The second text is from a science report. It describes a process over time; therefore, the logical organisation is temporal.

Note:

In text b the writer uses *finally* to describe the last step in the migration of life from the ocean to the land. This is quite different to the purpose *finally* serves in the description of factors contributing to cohesive writing which you read about in 3.1 (that is, *Finally, information is presented in an order which maintains the focus*). In this example *finally* contributes to the rhetorical organisation of the text: it signals to the reader that this is the last item we are going to talk about, rather than meaning this is the last thing that happened in a sequence.

1.3 Practising using different classes of connectives

1. Student misbehaviour is *caused* by the students' problems with life at school.
2. CSIRO's comprehensive planning *will result in* the identification of training needs.
3. CSIRO will identify training needs *through* comprehensive planning.
4. Comprehensive planning is the *way* CSIRO will identify training needs.

References

Eggs, S. (1994). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. Pinter: London.

Martin, J. R. (1986). Intervening in the process of writing development. In Painter, C. & J.R. Martin (Eds) *Writing to Mean: Teaching Genres Across the Curriculum*, Occasional Paper, No. 9, The Department of Linguistics, The University of Sydney.

Martin, J. R. (1993). Life as a Noun: Arresting the Universe in Science and Humanities. In Halliday, M.A.K. & Martin, J.R. (Eds), *Writing Science*, Falmer Press: London.

Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. (1991). *Writing Academic English* (2nd edition). Addison and Wesley: Mento Park, California.

Endnotes

1. The clause, like a sentence, contains a verb. However, a clause can be a smaller unit than the sentence as a sentence can be made up of several clauses. For example:

She opened the door. (one clause)

She opened the door, but she didn't speak to anyone (2 clauses).

2. This paragraph and paragraph B are from Learning Assistance Centre materials, the University of Sydney.

3. If you are interested in finding out more about the differences between spoken and written language and the significance of this for academic writing, see the self-access module **Academic English**.

4. When you use verbs and prepositions to express reasoning, you subsequently need to express events as 'things': that is, the verb **decided** becomes the noun **the decision**; likewise the verb **needed** becomes **the need**. We refer to nouns such as **decision** and **the need** as abstractions, or abstract things. These types of nouns are very common in academic writing.

5. Examples and explanation from Student Workbook and Lecture Notes, English Language Studies II, University of Wollongong, 1998.

6. These exercises involve turning verbs into nouns, which is called nominalisation. To learn about this process and its significance for academic writing, see the self-access unit on **Academic English**.

7. Adapted from Jones, J. (1988) *Grammatical Metaphor and Technicality in Academic Writing*. M.A. long essay. Department of Linguistics, University of Sydney.

8. Sentences 2 – 4 are from Martin, J. R (1986) 'Intervening in the process of writing development' in Painter and Martin (Eds) *Writing to Mean: Teaching Genres Across the Curriculum*, Occasional Paper, No. 9, The Department of Linguistics, The University of Sydney.

Table 1: Connectives

function	between sentences	between independent clauses	between dependent clauses	others
adding information	also, too, besides, in addition	and		another + Noun an additional + N
contrasting information	moreover, furthermore on the other hand, in contrast, nevertheless, nonetheless, however	but yet	although, even though, whereas, while	in spite of + Noun despite + Noun
exemplifying information	for example for instance			an example of + N, such as + N that is
explaining clarifying	indeed in fact			
concluding summarising	in conclusion to summarise			
ordering information chronologically	first, second ... next, last, meanwhile after that since then		before after until	the first + N the second + N before the + N since the +N
prioritising information	more importantly, above all otherwise			the most important + N
alternating causation (reasoning)		or for	if, unless because since	because of, as a result, as a consequence of, due to, to result from, the result of, the effect of X on Y, the consequence of, the cause of, the reason for, to result in, to cause, to have an effect on, to affect
showing cause (effect)	accordingly, as a result, consequently, hence	so		like, just like, alike, similar to, the same as, both ... and, not only. but also, to compare with, despite+ Noun in spite of + N
comparing information	similarly also too	and	as just as	like, just like, alike, similar to, the same as, both ... and, not only. but also, to compare with, despite+ Noun in spite of + N
conceding	however	but yet	although though even though	different from, unlike, to differ from, to compare to,
showing strong contrast	however, by comparison, on the other hand,	but		

Adapted from Oshima and Hogue, 1991, Writing Academic English, 2nd edition, Addison and Wesley, Mento Park, California.