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 clauses together. In other words, they are the words which express the logical relationship.
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.
Instead of a full stop before however, a semi-colon is also possible.

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.

On page 10 there is a table of connective words which are used to establish the logical relations in a text. The columns show where and how the connective words are used, while the rows refer to the logical relations that the connective words establish.

**Task 1.1 Identifying the logical relations**

Read the following text (the conclusion to a nursing essay). In the sections of the text marked (...), the connective word has been omitted.

By referring to Table 1 (on page 10) showing connective words **identify** the logical relationships, then **add** a suitable connective word. Make sure it is a suitable class of word (i.e. to go between clauses, between sentences, or to introduce a noun or ‘ing’ verb). The first one has been done for you.

*(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, (...) smoking, malnutrition, drugs and diseases, are closely related, (...) 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. (...) 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.

**Task 1.2 Comparing the logical relations in two texts**

**Circle** the connectives in the following texts and **write** in the column which type of logical relation they express. Is there a difference in the type of logical relation? Why might this be? The first one has been done for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text A</th>
<th>type of logical relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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. <strong>[In fact]</strong>, 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.</td>
<td>In fact (clarifying)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conjunction in academic writing

This section aims to develop your understanding of conjunction in academic writing, in particular the role of conjunction in reasoning, such as in explaining cause and effect. It also discusses the role of conjunction in structuring and developing your arguments in your written assignments.

Conjunction in written and spoken language: how we express reasoning

We use connectives like the ones in the connectives’ table to establish the logical relations in any text. Needless to say ‘text’ does not only refer to written language, but also to spoken language: a casual conversation with a friend can be regarded as a text. One distinguishing characteristic between a written text and spoken one is the way the logical relations are realised. In spoken language we tend to use conjunctions to join clauses together (using the connectives in the third and fourth columns). In written academic language, however, the logical relations tend to be established between sentences rather than between clauses. Furthermore, in the case of writing that expresses reason or cause, it is quite common for the logical relation to be expressed within the clause. That is, the writer uses a verb of cause such as caused or a phrase such as as a result (Martin, 1986, 1993). These grammatical choices have a significant effect on the level of abstraction in your writing. Compare the following sentences which all express cause.

The British decided to establish a penal colony at Botany Bay because they needed to dispose of convicts. There were also other reasons.

In the first sentence we have two events the British decided, and they (the British) needed. These events are causally related by because. Compare this with the next example:

The British decided to establish a penal colony at Botany Bay as a result of the need to dispose of convicts, as well as other reasons.

In the second example we still have the first event, but the second event has turned into a ‘thing’ or noun: the need to dispose of convicts. As a result there is only one clause rather than a clause complex as in the first example. In the final example, the event decided has been turned into an abstract noun, decision.

The decision to establish a penal colony at Botany Bay was due to more factors than the need to dispose of convicts.
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.

1. 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
2. CSIRO will plan comprehensively and thereby identify training needs. 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. 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. 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text A</th>
<th>type of logical relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>clarifying; causative; additive; additive; conclusion; exemplifying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text B</th>
<th>type of logical relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>these connectives sequence what happened (chronological order)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 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


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.


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

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