Cohesive writing

Grammatical referencing

WHAT IS COHESION?

Cohesion is a quality of effective writing. Cohesive writing helps readers understand how the details relate to the overall argument of a text and to follow it easily. The quality of cohesion in a written text is achieved by various means, which make different elements of the text hold together well: logical conjunction, grammatical referencing, lexical choice and paragraphing. This resource focuses on grammatical referencing.

MAKING REFERENCES WITHIN A TEXT

Grammatical referencing means the internal references you make within a text to other parts of the same text. This is different from the referencing that links an academic text to other texts that were read to inform it (sources of information that need to be cited in order to avoid plagiarism). Grammatical references **within** a text are what helps readers see connections between words, sentences and paragraphs.

This kind of reference is created when a noun introduced early in a text is then referred to again and again throughout the text, and in various ways, so that as the topic is expanded, readers can keep the same 'things' in mind, and not lose track of them. For example, in that last sentence you just read, the word 'nouns' is introduced, and then referred to several times, not by just repeating the word 'noun' but by other words ('topic', 'things' and the pronoun 'them'). When readers experience various word choices that they can only understand by referring back to the first item, it adds to their experience of cohesion in the text.

Effective text creates many and frequent references to things and ideas presented elsewhere in the same text. For example, we may refer to '*the government of Australia*' and later to '*it*', or we might refer to '*Australia*' and then later in the same text to '*this country*'. We can present an idea (eg *social inequality is increasing*) and recall the idea later through '*this fact*'. This constant process of reference creates threads through a text, for readers to hang onto, and thereby easily follow the text. Writers need to help readers by regularly referring back to what has already been mentioned, so they don't forget the main topic, and what is known or new in the given context. Reference items for doing this include the 'articles' before nouns, for example:

> *A man knocked on **the** door.*

In that sentence, we don't know which man is knocking, so the indefinite article 'a' indicates he is being introduced at this point in the text. On the other hand, 'door' is already somehow known to the reader – they can make sense of which door is being referred to, in the given context. In following sentences in the same text, the writer could replace 'man' with 'he' or 'the man', once the reader knows which one is meant (ie the one that *knocked on the door*).

In spoken language we can often refer to things in the surroundings using reference items such as *this*, *that*, *it*, as the listener can see, or infer what is being referred to. In written language, reference items generally only refer to things mentioned somewhere else **in the text**. Readers need to track backwards to find out what the reference item refers to. For example:

> *Julia Costello is facing a difficult situation at Western Technologies Corporation. She has difficulty functioning in the executive team. **This situation** is explained in terms of team dynamics and a number of solutions is included.*
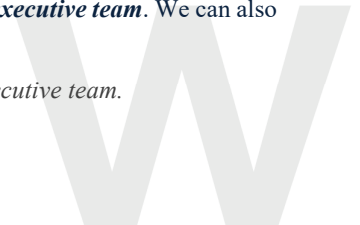
Here, '*This situation*' refers back to the noun phrase *difficulty functioning in the executive team*. We can also use reference items to refer forward to something that is about to be introduced:

> *Julia Costello's problem is **this**: she has difficulty functioning in the executive team.*

The process of referring to other items within a text creates cohesion by establishing threads – links between the reference words and what they refer to. In the following text example, consider how items are referred back to (only some reference words are highlighted):

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Example: referencing

With the increasing expansion of experimental science, particularly in the area of genetics, **scientists** have become more and more involved in the nature of the world's future. It has been argued that **scientists** have no moral responsibility for the use or misuse of **their** discoveries; however, **this** oversimplifies the issue. It ignores the fact that **top-level research scientists** are not ordinary people. Since **their** duty is to do no basic harm to **their** society, a society which has trained **them** and which funds **their** research, **they** should suppress those scientific discoveries which might be misused, and which ordinary people do not know about.

There are a number of reasons for **this**. In the first place, as individuals or as members of a research team, **scientists** are in a position to know what is going on at a given moment in **their** field, nationally and internationally. **They** are in a position to know what has been discovered and in which field crucial discoveries are likely to be made.

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(Adapted from: Smith, A (1985) *Towards a Safer World*, Bogus Press, London.)

TYPES OF REFERENCE IN GRAMMAR

There are three types of grammatical reference item:

- pronouns (*I*, *we*, *they*, *it* etc)
- demonstratives (*this/that*, *these/those* and *the*)
- comparatives (*another*, *more*, *such* etc).

One thing to note from the paragraph above is how useful such items can be to refer not only to nouns, but also to clauses, whole sentences, and even whole paragraphs. For example, '*this*' in the first paragraph refers to the previous clause, expressing the argument that '*scientists have no moral responsibility for the use or misuse of their discoveries*'. In the second paragraph, '*this*' refers to a longer chunk of text (the sentences in the first paragraph from '*It ignores …*' to the end of the paragraph).

Reference items can also be used to structure a whole argument through an essay: *first*, *second*, *third*. That is, you could begin the paragraphs with phrases such as *A major argument* …, *Another reason* …, *Such arguments* …. Similarly, instead of writing In conclusion, it would be possible to begin the conclusion section with *These arguments show* ….

Grammatical reference can seem complex in English, especially when it comes to the 'articles' introducing nouns and noun groups, because most other languages do not use words like *a*, *the*, *these* etc in the way English does, to create cohesion in text by reference.

PRONOUNS

Another area of confusion for speakers of other languages is that pronouns in English change depending on whether the reference is to something that is **singular** or **plural**, **living** or **inanimate**, **male** or **female** (where this may be attributed).

plural usage	Once **students** have selected from the menu, **they** can see what examples are available
singular – common usage	Once **a student** has selected from the menu, **she or he** can see what examples are available
singular – emerging/ inclusive usage	Once **a student** has selected from the menu, **they** can see what examples are available.

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Example: pronoun usage in essays	
Democracy has provided greater opportunities for women in many countries, however, **they** still face the pressures of dealing with traditional gender roles. In many cases, religious persuasion can affect the degree to which women are willing to challenge their roles. Often, **it** can prevent women from changing altogether, thereby reinforcing the status quo. Within some contexts, a woman can be punished if **she** is seen to be contradicting religious doctrine.	*excerpt from an essay in sociology*
There are two ways of arguing that passive euthanasia can be justified while active euthanasia cannot. The first relies on the intuition that killing **someone** is morally worse than letting **him or her** die. It is argued that **a doctor** who kills **his or her** patient directly causes **the patient's** death, but a doctor who withdraws or withholds treatment merely allows that death.	*excerpt from a philosophy essay*

DEMONSTRATIVES

As well as using pronouns (*she*, *he*, *it*, *they* etc), internal referencing can be created with demonstratives, such as *this*, *that*, *these*, *those* etc:

Example: pronouns vs demonstratives	
High salinity in soils is a problem facing many farmers in Australia. **This** is shown by recent studies focussing on the effects of intensive logging on land productivity.	*demonstrative*
The structural analysis of texts has become increasingly important to linguists in recent years. In fact, **it** is now an essential component of most linguistic inquiry.	*pronoun*
After heated debate, the legislation was finally passed. However, **it** has now been shown to have been racially discriminatory.	*pronoun*
Testing in schools often involves high levels of artificiality. **This** can lead to a misrepresentation of students' actual ability.	*demonstrative*

COMPARATIVES

Reference can also be achieved by comparing elements, using words like 'another', 'more' and 'such':

Example: comparative reference	
Traditional high culture in Brazil's thirties was preoccupied with **another** struggle, that against the right-wing dictatorship. Much of the intelligentsia and artistic scene, united in the Popular Front, chose the direction of regionalism. Upper class painter Tarsila do Amaral, after having explored aspects of Brazilian nativism in her work, now started to focus on …	*refers reader back to previous section of essay, discussing a different type of struggle*
Upper-class women were able to use chloroform during birth, but no **such** aids were available to those from the working class (Donnison, 1993). **Such** differences in treatment helped to increase the division between …	*refers reader back to something just mentioned*
Overall this shows that reliability and validity are hard to establish in official statistics, due to the number of human decisions involved, and the different ways in which people apply concepts. However, according to the radical approach, there are **more** limitations with statistics. The radical approach tells us that official statistics tell us …	*refers reader back to previous point, and prepares for new point*

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CLARITY

When we use pronouns to refer back to something already mentioned in a text, we must ensure readers can easily know **which item** is being referred to. Only use **it** to refer to an item already mentioned in the same sentence, or the sentence immediately preceding. For example:

> Although **television violence** can have damaging effects on children's social development, **it** has not been reduced by censorship measures.

If there is ambiguity about what is being referred to, consider using another type of reference such as a demonstrative item and a substitute noun. For example:

> **The International Monetary Fund** was established ..., which is a consequence of this fund.

Reference items can also be used to refer to items which have not yet appeared in the text. In the following example, **it** refers forward to **the decision**.

> Though the need to dispose of convicts may have been the stimulus behind **it**, **the decision** could not possibly have been made without looking at the larger picture.

Example: ambiguity vs clarity

The country's economic situation is becoming more serious each year, with inflation and unemployment constantly rising. In fact, according to the latest figures, **it** has reached the highest levels ever in recent months. The government has taken measures to address the economic crisis, but they have not yet succeeded in alleviating the problem. Rather, it seems that corruption and nepotism are becoming more and more entrenched among government officials. Serious restructuring of the economy and political system are required if **it** is to overcome this crisis.	*potentially unclear here whether 'it' refers to 'inflation and unemployment'* *unclear here what 'it' refers to*
The country's economic situation is becoming more serious each year, with inflation and unemployment constantly rising. In fact, according to the latest figures, **these** have reached the highest levels ever in recent months. The government has taken measures to address the economic crisis, but they have not yet succeeded in alleviating the problem. Rather, it seems that corruption and nepotism are becoming more and more entrenched among government officials. **This crisis** could be overcome by some serious restructuring of the economy and political system.	*greater clarity is achieved by use of demonstrative and plural* *a reorganisation of the sentence helps clarify the reference*

SYNOMYMS & SUBSTITUTES

Cohesive threads are also established in written text through the use of synonyms and alternative words. This maintains the same lexical meaning, while avoiding boring repetition of the same word (eg 'big' is another word for 'large'; 'harmful' is another word for 'detrimental'). In the following example, the IMF is referred to again in the second sentence without using the same name:

> **The International Monetary Fund (IMF)** announced conditions on its recent decision to assist debtor countries. Since its creation, **the organisation** has imposed structural readjustment on many of the world's poorer nations.

Readers know that the word '**organisation**' here refers back to the **IMF** and not something else, because of the associated use of '**the**', which indicates that whatever is being mentioned now refers back to something already introduced previously in the text.

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