

# Cohesive writing

## 3. Lexical cohesion: words that go together

Lexical cohesion<sup>1</sup> comes about when the nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs in a text go together and relate to each other in some way. The words in a text can relate to each other in terms of **repetition**, **synonymy** and **collocation**. In academic writing, lexical cohesion is an important factor contributing to the overall cohesion of your writing. This section will introduce briefly to the concept of lexical cohesion, and provide you with some examples and exercises.



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

### Repetition

When a lexical item (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) and variation of the word are repeated, it contributes to the text's overall cohesion. For example:

*Julia Costello is facing a **difficult** situation at Western Technologies Corporation. She has **difficulty** functioning in the executive team.*

*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.*

### Synonymy

Lexical cohesion occurs when a word is in some ways synonymous (the same) as a word that went before it in the text. In our example, **Western Technologies Corporation** and **the company** are different words which refer to the same thing:

*Julia Costello is facing a difficult situation at **Western Technologies Corporation**. She has difficulty functioning in **the company's** executive team.*

Another type of synonymy is when the words relate to each other in terms of specific-general: that is, when the specific items are '**kinds of something**'. For example:

***flax, hemp, and timber** are all kinds of **shipbuilding materials***

***human resources officer, the manager, the workers** are all kinds of **staff** or **employees**.*

Alternatively, the words can be related in terms of '**parts of something**'.

***the spillway, the dam wall** are parts of **a dam***

***the knee joint, the elbow joint** are parts of **the skeleton***



## Collocation

This is a type of 'expectancy relation' between lexical items. In other words, when a certain word occurs, you expect another word, or words to occur with it. For example, the word *ailment* is likely to be found together with *prescribe*, *diagnose* and *treat*. In other words, there is a tendency for the items to occur together.

## An example of a text showing lexical cohesion

The following student history synopsis is a well written piece of cohesive writing. The cohesion is created through conjunction and reference, and also through lexical cohesion. Read the synopsis carefully paying attention to highlighted words and how they relate to other words in the synopsis. You should try to work out how the highlighted words relate to each other (that is, in terms of repetition, synonymy, and collocation). The notes below the synopsis explain how the words go together.

Note that only some words have been selected to show lexical cohesion.

## Lexical cohesion in the history synopsis:

Note: all **boxed** words go together, all underlined words go together, and all the words in *italics* go together in some way.

The decision to establish a **penal colony** at Botany Bay was based on more factors than just the need to dispose of **convicts**. Besides the suitable conditions of the area that promised to make the **convicts** self-sufficient within a year - favourable climate, fertile soil, ample food sources and friendly natives, and its safe distance from *Britain* several other aspects of New South Wales made it appealing to the *country*. It offered an abundance of flax, hemp, and timber, which were much needed by the Navy at the time, as well as a strategic stronghold in the Pacific, which could be used in trade and defense. In addition, news of French interest in the area motivated quick action on the part of the *British* to claim the area using the most convenient reasons – the need for a dumping ground for **convicts**. Though the overcrowding of **hulks** in *Britain* is often offered as the primary reason for the establishment of a colony at Botany Bay, the decision to reinstitute **transportation** was actually made when numbers were down and conditions were improving in the **hulks**. Thus the *British* must have had other motives behind the choice. The *government* was not ignorant of the economic and military advantages of the area – numerous proposals by Matra, Call and Young made sure of that. And these considerations were not unique to Botany Bay. The economic and military values of Das Voltas and Lemain, among others were examined as well. 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.

How the items are related:

- All the **boxed words**, that is *penal colony*, *convicts*, *hulks*, *transportation* have something to do with **penal colony**. In other words the word *convict* is 'part of the whole' in regards to *penal colony*, and *convicts* is also repeated. Similarly, you would expect the word *hulks* to occur together with *penal colony*, and it is also repeated. You would also expect the word *transportation* to occur together with *penal colony*
- All the underlined words refer to **Botany Bay**. That is *the area*, and *New South Wales* are used as synonyms for Botany Bay, and *the area* and *Botany Bay* are also repeated.



## Key

### 3.1 Tracing the links between words

- *decision: decision (repetition), choice (synonymy), decision (repetition)*
- FACTORS: REASONS (*synonymy*)
- **favourable: appealing** (*synonymy*)
- **ample: abundance** (*synonymy*)
- NAVY: DEFENSE (*synonymy: part of whole*)
- **economic and military advantages: economic and military values** (*synonymy*)

The *decision* to establish a penal colony at Botany Bay was based on more FACTORS than just the need to dispose of convicts. Besides the suitable conditions of the area that promised to make the convicts self-sufficient within a year - **favourable** climate, fertile soil, ample food sources and friendly natives, and its safe distance from Britain, several other aspects of New South Wales made it **appealing** to the country. It offered an abundance of flax, hemp, and timber, which were much needed by the NAVY at the time, as well as a strategic stronghold in the Pacific, which could be used in trade and DEFENSE. In addition, news of French interest in the area motivated quick action on the part of the British to claim the area using the most convenient REASONS – the need for a dumping ground for convicts. Though the overcrowding of hulks in Britain is often offered as the primary REASON for the establishment of a colony at Botany Bay, the *decision* to reinstitute transportation was actually made when numbers were down and conditions were improving in the hulks. Thus the British must have had other motives behind the *choice*. The government was not ignorant of the **economic and military advantages** of the area – numerous proposals by Matra, Call and Young made sure of that. And these considerations were not unique to Botany Bay. **The economic and military values** of Das Voltas and Lemain, among others were examined as well. 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.

## Endnotes

1. This material is adapted from *Lecture Notes and Workbook*, English Language Studies II, Modern Languages Programme, University of Wollongong, 1998.