

Cohesion

Cohesion is a characteristic of a successful essay *when it flows as a united whole*; meaning, there is unity and connectedness between all of the parts. Cohesion is a writing issue at a macro and micro level. At a macro-level, cohesion is the way a paper uses a thesis sentence, topic sentences, and transitions across paragraphs to help unify and focus a paper. On a micro-level, cohesion happens within the paragraph unit between sentences; when each sentence links back to the previous sentence and looks ahead to the next, there is cohesion across sentences. Cohesion is an important aspect of writing because it helps readers to follow the writer's thinking.

Misconceptions & Stumbling Blocks

Many writers believe that you should avoid repetition at all costs. It's true that strong writing tends to not feel repetitive in terms of style and word choice; however, some repetition is necessary in order to build an essay and even paragraphs that build on each other and develop logically. A pro tip when you're drafting an essay would be to build in a lot of repetition and then as you revise, go through your essay and look for ways you can better develop your ideas by paraphrasing your argument and using appropriate synonyms.

Building Cohesion

Essay Focus: Macro Cohesion

Locate & read your thesis sentence and the first and last sentence of each paragraph. You might even highlight them and/or use a separate piece of paper to make note of the key ideas and subjects in each (that is, making a reverse outline while you're reading).

Consider:

- How do these sentences relate?
- How can you use the language of the thesis statement again in topic sentences to reconnect to the main argument?
- Does each paragraph clearly link back to the thesis? Is it clear how each paragraph adds to, extends, or complicates the thesis?

Use:

- Repetition of key terms and ideas (especially those that are key to the argument)
- Repetition of central arguments; ideally, more than repeating your argument, it evolves and develops as it encounters new supporting or conflicting evidence.
- Appropriate synonyms. Synonyms as well as restating (paraphrasing) main ideas and arguments both helps you to explain and develop the argument and to build cohesion in your essay.

Paragraph Focus: Micro Cohesion

For one paragraph, underline the subject and verb of each sentence.

Consider:

- Does the paragraph have a consistent & narrow focus?
- Will readers see the connection between the sentences?
- Imagine that there is a title for this paragraph: what would it be and how would it relate to the underlined words?

Use:

- Repetition of the central topic and a clear understanding of how the evidence in this paragraph pushes forward or complicates that idea.
- Variations on the topic
- Avoid unclear pronouns (e.g., it, this, these, etc.). Rather than using pronouns, try to state a clear and specific subject for each sentence. This is an opportunity to develop your meaning through naming your topic in different ways.
- Synonyms for key terms and ideas that help you to say your point in slightly new ways that also push forward your ideas.

Sentence to Sentence: Micro Cohesion

Looking at one paragraph, try to name what each sentence is doing to the previous: is it adding further explanation? Is it complicating the topic? Is it providing an example? Is it offering a counter-perspective? Sentences that build off of each other have movement that is intentional and purposeful; that is, the writer knows the purpose of each sentence and the work that each sentence accomplishes for the paragraph.

Use:

- Transition words (look up a chart) to link sentence and to more clearly name what you're doing in each sentence (e.g., again, likewise, indeed, therefore, however, additionally, etc.)
- Precise verbs to help emphasize what the writer is doing and saying (if you're working with a source/text) or what you're doing and saying.
- Again, clear and precise subjects that continue to name your focus in each sentence.