

Unit 12: Unity and coherence in a composition

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Objectives:

After studying this Unit, a student

- understands what unity and coherence in a composition are.
- understands how to make a composition unified and coherent.
- can do the exercise effectively.

1. Definition of unity and how to achieve it in a composition

Like a paragraph, a well-written composition must have unity. Unlike a paragraph, a composition must meet two levels of unity: overall unity and internal unity.

Overall unity refers to unity through the whole composition. To achieve such unity, the composition must be written in such a way that every support paragraph of the composition provides a major point to support, explain or prove the thesis stated in the thesis sentence. And, every topic sentence of every support paragraph must also be based on or relevant to some major point of the main idea.

Internal unity means that the individual support paragraphs have unity. That is, every support paragraph has its own topic sentence based on the main idea. This topic sentence must be expanded, explained or proved by relevant major support sentence, and sometimes by minor support sentences. Achieving unity in support paragraphs is the same as that in a single paragraph as explained in Unit 2.

2. Definition of coherence and how to achieve it in a composition

Besides unity, a well-written composition must also have coherence. A composition must also meet two levels of coherence: internal coherence and overall coherence.

Internal coherence refers to the relationships among sentences within an individual support paragraph. That is, the line of thought flows smoothly and continuously from one sentence to another. Coherence in individual support paragraphs can be achieved by arranging all the support sentences in a proper order and by using appropriate transition markers as explained in Unit 3.

Overall coherence in a composition refers to the relationships among all the paragraphs in a composition. That is, the line of thought from one paragraph to another paragraph is linked and flows smoothly and continuously from the beginning to the end. Coherence in a composition may be achieved in the following ways.

2.1. Arranging support paragraphs in a logical and proper order.

To arrange support paragraphs logically and properly must depend on the major points which have been defined in the thesis sentence, or by the sentences that clarify the thesis sentence. This arrangement is similar to that of sentences in a single paragraph as discussed in Unit 3.

2.2. Using transition expressions (markers) to link one paragraph to another.

The judicious use of transition expressions, such as **Firstly, Secondly, Finally, Accordingly, Consequently, As a result, Hence, Therefore, Thus, Similarly, In the same way, On the contrary, On the other hand, However, Furthermore, Moreover, In**

addition, etc., helps indicate coherence throughout the whole composition. However there are many transitional expressions, and they must be accurately used, according to the methods of development. For example, it is not reasonable to begin a paragraph by writing "In the **same way**" if what follows is not "in the same way"; also it is not reasonable to write "**Consequently**" or "**as a result**" at the beginning of a paragraph if what follows is not a consequence or a result of the previous or preceding paragraph (See Unit 3.)

2.3. Repeating or restating key opinion words or phrases used or appearing in the introductory paragraph or in the preceding paragraph.

Sometimes, instead of using transition expressions, the repetition of key opinion words or phrases can be used. And sometimes, to avoid using repetition of key opinions words repeatedly in every paragraph, restating by using synonyms for them is also helpful for linking the idea of one paragraph to another.

For more understanding of how unity and coherence in a composition can be achieved through various techniques explained above, study carefully the following example composition on the topic "The Buddhist Concept of a Good Friend"

The Buddhist Concept of a Good Friend

A ¹ According to Buddhism, having a good friend is considered a great advantage and honoured by the Lord Buddha to be a kind of living a holy life itself.

² Because of his good friend, one will possibly be able to achieve the highest goal of life, on both secular and spiritual planes, as taught in Buddhism.

³ The following are four kinds of good friend according to the Buddhist concept, namely, a friend who is helpful, a friend who shares both happiness and suffering, a friend who gives good advice and a friend who sympathizes.

B ¹ A good friend who is helpful has four characteristics. ² First, he prevents his friend who, because of his carelessness, has been living a useless life from proceeding further in such a wrong way ³ For example, he saves his friend who is fond of gambling and encourages him to earn a living righteously.

⁴ Second, he also protects such friend's property, and third, provides shelter in the face of danger. ⁵ Last, he provides financial assistance in a larger amount than requested when his friend experiences hardships or suffers money shortages.

C ¹ One who unlocks his heart disclosing his own secrets or confidential matters to his friend is the first kind of a friend who is the same in good and bad times. ² Second is one who tries his best to protect his friend's undisclosable affairs. ³ Next is one who does not leave his friend to be alone in risky situations. ⁴ And finally is the one who is brave enough to sacrifice even his own life in place of his friend's if necessary. ⁵ This can be done only when he considers that his friend's life is more useful than his. ⁶ The four abovementioned are the characteristics of a friend who shares both happiness and suffering.

D ¹ A friend who gives useful advice has the following four characteristics. ² To prohibit his friend from doing bad is the first, followed by advising him to do good and live a useful life. ³ The third qualification is to educate him about anything right or wrong that he has never listened to before. ⁴ And the fourth one is to instruct him to follow the righteous way leading to peace and happiness both in this life and the hereafter.

E ¹ A sympathizing friend, the last kind of good friend, also has four qualifications. ² First, he is happy whenever his friend is happy, and second, he feels unhappy and worried whenever his friend is sad

³ Moreover, he is ready to engage in a war of words with anyone who wrongfully blames his friend, while joyfully supporting and quaranteeing those who rightfully praise or adore his friend. ⁴ This means that he feels no envy of, nor adopts prejudice against, his own friend at all.

F ¹ It can be said that a good friend can be compared with good surroundings. ² Amidst agreeable surroundings, man can live a life of high quality. ³ Similarly, surrounding himself with good friends, man can achieve the highest goals of life, be they secular or spiritual. ⁴ Therefore, the Lord Buddha honoured having a good friend as high as living a holy life.

The above composition is a good example for a composition developed by classification--classifying a good friend, according to Buddhest concepts, into four kinds, defined in the thesis sentence.--sentence 3 of the introductory paragraph. Unity, both overall and internal, is good because the topic sentence--the first sentence of support paragraphs B, D and E and the last sentence of paragraph C--is based on or relevant to the main points of the sentence--four kinds of good friend. The support sentences of the individual support paragraphs are also relevant to the topic sentences of each support paragraph. This element makes each support paragraph unified which also leads to unity

throughout the composition.

The above composition is also entirely coherent. That is, the overall coherence is made up by orderly arranging all support paragraphs according to the order defined in the thesis sentence-- "a friend who is helpful, a friend who shares both happiness and suffering, a friend who gives good advice, and a friend who sympathizes", respectively. Another device to make overall coherence is repeating or restating key opinion words or phrases shown by underlining in each support paragraph. Coherence within individual support paragraphs--internal coherence--is also good. Transitional markers, such as **First**, **Second**, **Next**, **Finally**, **For example**, are used to achieve such coherence.

To sum up

1. A composition must have both overall unity--unity throughout the composition--and internal unity--unity within each individual support paragraph.
2. All support paragraphs, related or relevant to the main idea of the thesis sentence, bring about overall unity, and all topic sentences of each support paragraph, supported by relevant details, bring about internal unity.
3. A composition must also have both overall and internal unity.
4. Overall coherence is achieved by
 1. arranging support paragraphs in a proper order.
 2. using transitional expressions.
 3. restating key opinion words or phrases.
5. Internal coherence is achieved by arranging support details within each support paragraph with the help of transition markers.

3. Exercises about unity and coherence in a composition

Exercise 1.

Directions: Read the following composition carefully in order to evaluate the unity, coherence and method of development. Then do the tasks given and write your answers in the spaces provided.

A ¹ An opportunity to get employed is not easy at the present time. ² Many persons fail to win employment, even though such an opportunity has arrived. ³ This is because they do not prepare themselves well for either an interview or any form of tests used by employers to select the best applicant for the vacant position. ⁴ Therefore, in order to make a good impression at a job interview, one is required to prepare himself well for possible questions, have a good personality and be punctual for the interview.

B ¹ At a job interview, an applicant has to get himself prepared for all possible questions. ² First, he must be well-prepared in the major subjects he has taken at the high-school or college level. ³ Second, he is also required to have some knowledge of related subjects which will help increase his competence at work. ⁴ Third, it is a "must" for the applicant to

know well about the job he is interviewed for.

⁵ Moreover, he should have some knowledge concerning the company or organization where he is expected to be employed. ⁶ It cannot be forgotten that one who is able to answer clearly and fluently has a better chance of getting the job.

C ¹ As generally admitted, a good personality can, more than half the time, bring about success in job finding. ² A man with a good personality impresses everyone in every social gathering. ³ And personality is considered much more important in the business world. ⁴ So, an applicant for a job must prepare his personality as well as possible before appearing in front of his interviewer. ⁵ For example, his hair must be combed tidily. ⁶ His moustache and beard must be shaven clearly, and the clothes and the shoes he wears must look clean, well-ironed and well-polished. ⁷ Additionally, his verbal and bodily performance must be both active and energetic. ⁸ Because of his good personality, he is sure to win the interviewer's heart.

D ¹ Punctuality is another requirement at a job interview. ² A job seeker can by no means follow a proverb saying, "Later is better than never." ³ On the contrary, he must bear in mind that just a second

late may mean losing a job. ⁴ Therefore, in order to arrive in or on time, he has to have his travel plans well prepared. ⁵ For example, he must leave his house earlier than usual if he goes by bus. ⁶ And he should also start early even though he travels by his own car or taxi in view of traffic congestion.

E ¹ Good preparation is nothing but good planning. ² A good plan ensures one's success in all kinds of work. ³ Therefore, if a job applicant wants to succeed, he has to have good planning, or in other words, to have himself well-prepared. ⁴ Of course, good preparation always bears good satisfactory results.

1. State the topic of the above composition.

Topic: _____

2. Indicate the thesis sentence.

Thesis sentence: _____

3. Indicate the words, phrases or even a sentence in paragraphs B, C, D and E that make the whole composition coherent.

Paragraph B: _____

Paragraph C: _____

Paragraph D: _____

Paragraph E: _____

4. Indicate what techniques the writer uses to make the composition unified. _____

5. Indicate what techniques the writer uses to make the composition coherent. _____

6. The above composition is developed by the method of _____

Exercise 2.

Directions: The following introduction paragraph is followed by two support paragraphs--both of which lack a topic sentence--and a conclusion paragraph. Read the composition carefully. Give the appropriate topic, write a possible topic sentence for each support paragraph, indicate the method of development in the spaces provided, and then compare it with the complete composition on the next pages. Keep in mind that it is neither a good idea nor useful for you to look at the answer given before writing your own.

Many people like the taste of durian in spite of its bad smell. Some people are not bothered by traffic jams because they read or do something useful while they wait for the cars to move. A few people may even enjoy the mess caused by construction because they feel that the future will be better for their children. Just as almost everything in life, the mass media--television, movies, radio, magazines, newspapers, etc.--have both advantages and disadvantages for people. Whether the media are advantageous or disadvantageous depends on whether or not the viewer/reader can critically evaluate their two purposes--to inform and to entertain.

Essential information includes weather and news reports given in newspapers and on television. Weather reports should be believable, but news reports may be biased--the reader/listener must decide. Information is also provided by magazine articles, television documentaries, etc., which the reader/viewer must also read or watch critically to determine their value. Non-essential information consists primarily of advertising. It may be difficult for the reader/viewer to determine whether or not the inform-

ation given is true or is simply an attempt to sell a product.

Serious entertainment may present stories, plays, etc., that emphasize ideals that people should strive for, or it may present non-real life situations or unnecessary violence that children and teenagers should not see. For example, a movie about an inter-cultural marriage overcoming the problems it encounters would give the viewer advice about overcoming his own problems, but a movie about crime suppression that emphasizes a lot of unnecessary violence would only teach that violence is acceptable. Comic entertainment may sincerely try to amuse the reader/viewer or may include elements that are so outrageous that they are not amusing. Game shows, for example, may be simply funny, or they may make the contestants look silly. Cartoons, in newspapers or on television, sometimes try to make violence seem funny.

In all cases, the media are interested primarily in being seen or heard. The reader/viewer, thus, must decide whether what he reads/sees is advantageous or not. The reader/viewer who critical-

ly evaluates everything he reads/sees will benefit from the things presented by the media.

1. Possible topic: _____

2. This composition is developed by _____

3. Topic sentence 1: _____

4. Topic sentence 2: _____

Possible composition

Mass Media: Good or Bad?

Many people like the taste of durian in spite of its bad smell. Some people are not bothered by traffic jams because they read or do something useful while they wait for the cars to move. A few people may even enjoy the mess caused by construction because they feel that the future will be better for their children. Just as almost everything in life, the mass media--television, movies, radio, magazines, newspapers, etc.--have both advantages and disadvantages for people. Whether the media are advantageous or disadvantageous depends on whether or not the

viewer/reader can critically evaluate their two purposes--to inform and to entertain.

There are two basic kinds of media information: essential and non-essential. Essential information includes weather and news reports given in newspapers and on television. Weather reports should be believable, but news reports may be biased--the reader/listener must decide. Information is also provided by magazine articles, television documentaries, etc., which the reader/viewer must also read or watch critically to determine their value. Non-essential information consists primarily of advertising. It may be difficult for the reader/viewer to determine whether or not the information given is true or is simply an attempt to sell a product.

Media entertainment is also of two kinds: serious and comic. Serious entertainment may present stories, plays, etc., that emphasize ideals that people should strive for, or it may present non-real life situations or unnecessary violence that children and teenagers should not see. For example, a movie about an inter-cultural marriage overcoming the problems it encounters would give the viewer advice about overcoming his own problems, but a movie about crime suppression that emphasizes a lot of unneces-

sary violence would only teach that violence is acceptable. Comic entertainment may sincerely try to amuse the reader/viewer or may include elements that are so outrageous that they are not amusing. Game shows, for example, may be simply funny, or they may make the contestants look silly. Cartoons, in newspapers or on television, sometimes try to make violence seem funny.

In all cases, the media are interested primarily in being seen or heard. The reader/viewer, thus, must decide whether what he reads/sees is advantageous or not. The reader/viewer who critically evaluates everything he reads/ sees will benefit from the things presented by the media.

Exercise 3:

Directions: The following are two topics. One could be developed by the method of analyzing causes and the other by comparison and contrast. To write your own composition do the follow tasks:

1. write the thesis sentence for each topic.
2. find the main points of the thesis sentence and, using these main points, write possible topic sentences for support paragraphs.
3. develop the topic sentences into complete support paragraphs.

4. write an introduction and a conclusion for each of your own compositions, and then compare them with the possible answers given on the next pages. It is important for you not to look at the answers before writing your own composition.

Topic 1: The Causes of Failure in Studies by University Students.

Write your own composition here.

Blank lined paper with three sets of horizontal lines.

Possible answer: The Causes of Failure in Studies by University Students

It is a fact that all students wish to be successful in their studies. Some succeed as they wish, but some are disappointed. With regard to the unsuccessful students, their failure seems to result from a poor academic background, a lack of self-discipline and poor preparation.

Some students fail in their studies because of a poor academic background. That is to say, they do not have adequate knowledge in the field of the major subject they have enrolled in. When they attend class, they cannot follow and understand what the lecturer says. This may arise from the fact that they have chosen to major in a certain field of study without good educational guidance, i.e., they

choose a major because of some potential advantages rather than because of their own ability and aptitude. In other words, they do not prepare themselves for university-level work. As a result, they find themselves unable to succeed.

Another principle cause of student failure is the lack of self-discipline. While studying in high school, most students always depend upon their parents and teachers to make sure that they always complete all assignments. When they come to study at the university level, especially at an open university, they have to depend upon themselves. Those who cannot impose order and regulation on their own student life are always distracted by other activities instead of attending to their studies. The result is failure.

Finally, some students may fail because of poor preparation for university-level work. This means that during high school they may have chosen easy subjects rather than university preparatory courses. When they come to the university level, they have to face more difficult subjects than they did in high school. They never prepare their lessons before attending class. They may not attend class regularly. So they miss the important points discussed in the class. After class, they never review the points likely to be raised in the examination

and spend their time in other activities, such as parties, movies, etc. Consequently, when the examination comes, they fail.

These three major causes are considered to be the important factors leading to the failure of university students in their studies. Certainly, then, the students who have a good academic background, self-discipline, and good preparation are expected to be successful in their studies.

Possible answer: Democracy and Communism

Generally, there are four kinds of political system: democracy, socialism, communism and dictatorship. Among them, democracy and communism are popular. The differences between democratic and communistic governments can be seen in the following ways.

In democratic government, it is believed that people are supreme, and the government is their servant. A democratic constitution guarantees people the right to choose their leaders. The two-party system insures them a choice. Moreover, a democratic government guarantees the people complete freedom to worship any religion they please. In addition, a democratic government gives everyone the privilege of saying or writing exactly what he thinks, even to

the point of criticizing his government.

On the contrary, in the communist political system, the government is supreme and the people are its servants. Control of the government rests in the hands of a small group of leaders. Voting is a farce because there is only one party--the Communist Party. Moreover, the people do not have the privilege of criticizing their government. Freedom to speak and write do not exist for them. Any citizen who dares to oppose the ruling group receives harsh treatment. In addition, the leaders of a communist government discourage religion and religious worship. Frankly speaking, the people, living in constant fear of their government, are afraid to express any ideas contrary to those of the leaders.

Thus, it is easily seen that democracy and communism differ in various basic, important ways: where the real power lies, how the leaders are chosen, and what freedom--especially speech and religion--the people have.(1)

(1) Adapted from Warriner, op.cit., pp.339-340.