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Objectives:

- After studying this Unit, a student
- knows what coherence in a paragraph is.
 - knows how to make a paragraph coherent in different ways.
 - can do the exercises effectively.

1. Definition of coherence in a paragraph

Another important element of a paragraph is coherence. In writing, coherence is closely related to unity, but it is not the same: it means "logical and natural connection". Coherence in a paragraph refers to the tight organization and logical structure of a paragraph. A coherent paragraph is one in which all the sentences are logically arranged and combined with one another in such a way that one thought or idea flows smoothly to the next and the relationship between one sentence and another is clearly indicated.

Consider the following paragraph, of which all the sentences are logically arranged.

To get the most use out of his textbooks, a student should follow several steps very carefully. He should make a survey of each book to get a general idea of what the book contains. He should read for understanding and formulate questions. He should make notes of the important points of each chapter of the book. He should test himself to be sure that he can answer questions likely to be raised in class and in examinations. He should review his notes and reread any parts of the book that are unclear to him. (1)

(1) Adapted from Sullivan, op. cit., p.8.

The above paragraph is coherent because all the sentences are arranged in chronological order. But it is still not completely clear because the thought or idea does not flow smoothly.

Smooth flow of thought refers to how well one thought or sentence is related to another. Smooth flow can be achieved through the use of certain sentence combining devices, called "transition markers", that provide the links between the idea of one sentence and the next. Read the revised paragraph below and see what makes it more obviously coherent.

To get the most use out of his textbooks, a student should follow several steps very carefully. First, he should make a survey of each book to get a general idea of what the book contains. Second, he should read for deeper understanding and formulate questions as he reads. Next, he should make notes of the important points of each chapter of the book. After that, he should test himself to be sure that he can answer the questions likely to be raised in class and in examinations. Finally, he should review his notes and reread any parts of the book that are unclear to him.

The above paragraph is completely clear because of two factors. First, all the sentences in the paragraph are arranged in chronological order. That is, the writer points out how to

read a textbook from the first step to the last step. Second, the relationships between one sentence and another are clearly indicated. The relationships are linked by transition markers (shown in the above paragraph by underlining). The use of transition markers helps the flow of thought or ideas move smoothly from one sentence to the next.

2. Ways to achieve coherence in a paragraph

A good paragraph must have not only unity as discussed in Unit 2, but also coherence. A paragraph is unified only when all the support sentences are relevant and related to the topic sentence, and a paragraph is coherent when all the support sentences are arranged in a clear order and the relationships among these sentences are clearly and logically shown. Therefore, coherence in a paragraph depends on two factors. They are

1. a logical arrangement of sentences (details) in a clear order;
2. clear relationships among the sentences.

2.1. Arrange the sentences in a paragraph in a clear and logical order

The most natural and familiar way to achieve coherence in a paragraph is to arrange all the sentences or details within a paragraph in a clear order or sequence. In fact, there are various methods of arranging your sentences or details. However,

the particular method which you choose to order the sentences of a paragraph depends on the nature of the subject and your purpose. That is, some subjects require details arranged in chronological order, some in spatial order, and some in other orders. Therefore, the first step in ordering your details is to consider your subject and the purpose of the discussion. The nature of the particular subject will guide you in which order your details should be arranged. There are two obvious ways to arrange details in a clear order; chronological order and spatial order, and there are also other less obvious ways.

2.1.1. Arranging details in chronological order

As mentioned above, how you should arrange details in a proper order depends on your subject and purpose. A paragraph whose subject and purpose involve telling a story or explaining a process requires details arranged in chronological order, which means simply the order in which the events happen. The most obvious use of this kind of order can usually be seen in a narrative paragraph in which the writer begins at a specific point and then tells what happens, and what happens next until reaching the end as in the following paragraph.

¹ *On our trip to San Francisco, Anton and I found a number of inexpensive ways to explore the city.* ² *The firstday we took a cable car to the top of Nob Hill.* ³ *From there the view of the Bay and the*

Golden Gate Bridge is unforgettable. ⁴ That same day we went sightseeing at picturesque Fisherman's Wharf and Chinatown. ⁵ Both of these areas are famous for some of their low-priced restaurants and delicious meals. ⁶ At Fisherman's Wharf Anton invited me to have lunch at the Grotto, a well-known seafood restaurant. ⁷ The second day we bicycled through Golden Gate Park and visited the museums there. ⁸ The last day of our stay, we tried to get tickets for the circus. ⁹ Unfortunately there were no tickets left, so we drove around and looked at some of the beautiful homes instead. (1)

In the above paragraph the writer's purpose is to present the events in exploring the city. All the sentences are arranged in order of time (chronological order): the writer relates events with clear relationships among the sentences, providing the transition phrases "The first day ---", "That same day", "The second day ---", and "the last day ---" to make the paragraph clearly coherent.

(1) Adapted from Mathews, Patricia E., et al., Practice Plan and Write ; Guided Composition for Students of English Book I, Litton Educational Publishing, Inc., U.S.A, 1973, p.107.

A paragraph whose purpose is to give specific directions or to explain a process or to show how to do something also requires all the sentences or details to be arranged in chronological order as in the following paragraph.

¹ To wash a dog properly, one should follow several steps with utmost care. ² First, he should make sure that his dog knows nothing, in advance, of his plan to wash it. ³ After preparing a tub of warm water, he should plunge the dog into it tenderly but firmly. ⁴ Next, keeping its head well above water, he should soap its whole body, proceeding from its neck to its tail. ⁵ After his dog is completely covered with soap, he should rinse it thoroughly. ⁶ After that he should dry it as soon as possible. (1)

The writer's purpose of the above paragraph is to explain a process or how to do something. All the sentences or details are arranged in chronological order--order of time--explaining how to wash a dog step by step until the final step. The word(s) or phrase(s) that make the above paragraph coherent are shown by underlining.

(1) Adapted from Sullivan, op. cit., p.39.

2.1.2. Arranging details in spatial order

A paragraph whose subject involves describing the physical appearance of a person, a place or any part of a thing requires that the details or sentences be arranged in spatial order, which means an order in which the description will begin at a particular point and then move logically in some direction. For example, if you have to describe a place, you can go from left to right, from right to left, from top to bottom, or from bottom to top, from east to west, from near to far, from inside to outside and the like. Sometimes, however, you may describe some place to show a clear picture of the scene. In this case, it is necessary for you to describe the first thing you see. The paragraph below shows how the writer arranges the details (support sentences) in spatial order to achieve coherence.

My bedroom is not an ordinary Thai bedroom. On the left of the doorway are a desk and a chair. Next to the desk is a showcase. In the left wall, there is a door leading to a balcony. Next to this door are two windows. Under the windows, there is an air conditioner. In the wall opposite the door, there are two windows. Between the windows, there are two showcases. In front of the showcases, there are a television and a stereo set. In the corners of the opposite wall are two speakers. In the right wall, there is a door leading to my mother's bedroom. Next

to the door, there is a bookcase with my tools. Next
to the bookcase, there is a wardrobe. In the middle
of all this is my bed. (1)

The writer is standing in the doorway to his bedroom. He describes the bedroom, starting at his left and continuing to his right. The underlined transition markers show clearly how the writer describes his bedroom following spatial order.

Sometimes, the subject of a paragraph may involve describing the physical appearance of a person. Such a paragraph also requires arrangement of details in spatial order. The description may cover the whole body of a person beginning from head to feet. It is, however, better for you to focus your details on one or two outstanding features to show some characteristics of a person. In the paragraph below, the details are focused on one feature "beautiful" and arranged in spatial order.

Marie is as beautiful as any Hollywood star. Her thick long black hair falls down to her shoulders. She has a oval-shaped face with a delicate complexion. She also has not too large deep blue eyes with slightly arched eyebrows. Her nose is straight and neither too long nor too short. Her small mouth looks delicate and feminine. A small black mole on the left side of

(1) Student writing

her mouth adds to her beauty. Her lips are rather thin, and her light pink lipstick adds another touch of feminine beauty. When she smiles, white teeth brighten up her whole face. (1)

The above paragraph is coherent because all the details are arranged in spatial order. That is, the description focuses on one outstanding feature "beautiful". The arrangement begins from "hair" then "face" respectively until "teeth". This arrangement helps the thought flow smoothly and creates clear relationships among sentences automatically without any transitional devices.

2.1.3. Arranging details in other orders

Not all paragraph details are best arranged in chronological or spatial order. Some paragraph subjects require that details be arranged according to your logic or rationality, and there are no set names for the arrangements for such a paragraph because there is a large number of such techniques. In this case, you must decide to arrange your details on the basis which will be clearest for your reader and will be most reasonable for your purpose. For example, if a paragraph subject involves giving

(1) Adapted from Smalley, Regina L., et al., Refining Composition Skills, 2nd. edition, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1986, p.78.

examples or reasons to convince your reader, or analysing causes and effects, it is reasonable for you to arrange the details from the least important to the most important. Also, some paragraph subjects involve presenting factual statements. In this case, it is also reasonable to arrange your details beginning with the most obvious familiar details and moving toward the less obvious or less familiar details. Consider the following two paragraphs.

There are three main reasons for my decision to attend a coeducational college. The first, and admittedly the least important, is that I think I will have more fun at a coeducational college. I have always enjoyed mixed company more than "hen parties", and I am afraid that I will be bored in the company of girls four or five days a week for four years. For the second reason, I think that we should have the male viewpoint in our classes. It is one thing to learn what men say and what their attitudes are toward a subject, but it is quite another to hear it firsthand. Finally, and most important, I think that education is supposed to be a preparation for life. It is better to prepare for life in the world where men and women are constantly together than a women's world all through college years (1)

(1) Adapted from. Warriner, John E., et al., English Grammar and Composition; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Inc. New York, 1973, pp. 337-338.

In the above paragraph, the writer gives three reasons for her preference for attending a coeducational college, arranging them from the least important reason to the most important reason.

Again, consider the paragraph below.

A computer has two different kinds of memory. One is called ROM (Read Only Memory) and the other RAM (Random-Access Memory). ROM memory contains all the computer instructions that were put in by the computer manufacturer. The user can read these instructions, but cannot change them. RAM memory is like a blank cassette. The user can record music, then erase it, or add more to it. RAM memory is very important for any computer user because it stores the information that they put in it (1)

In the above paragraph, the writer, after presenting two kinds of computer memory, points out the more familiar, but the less important one, ROM, then moves toward the less familiar but the more important one, RAM.

(1) Adapted from Allen, Harold B., et al., The New Technologies: Readings for Learners of English, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Singapore, 1986, p.25.

2.2. Make clear the relationships among sentences

Coherence in a paragraph depends not only on arranging all details in clear and logical order, but also on making clear the relationships among sentences. Though there are many different techniques to make relationships among sentences clear, the most obvious and helpful techniques include using precise pronoun reference and using transition markers.

2.2.1. Using precise pronoun reference

The first technique for making clear relationships among sentences to achieve coherence in a paragraph is using precise pronouns which refer to the words or ideas expressed in the preceding sentences. Using precise pronouns can be a valuable technique for the writer to link the idea of a preceding sentence to the idea of the next sentence. This technique helps the thoughts or ideas flow smoothly from sentence to sentence. The pronouns that are commonly used include: He, She, It, They, Them, This, That, These and Those. Subordinators, such as Who, What, Which, Where, When, Why and How, can also be used to link the ideas of adjacent sentences. However, these pronouns and subordinators must be used correctly; otherwise the reader will be confused, and the misuse of them can also make a paragraph incoherent.

In the example below, the use of imprecise pronouns makes the paragraph incoherent. The misused pronouns are shown in bold type.

¹ People today yearn to unload their problems on "experts" and let ~~them~~ tell ~~them~~ what to do.
² Experts can help. ³ But what ~~they~~ really need is a good dose of reason and common sense. ⁴ He must try to figure out why his problems exist and why he undergoes personal trauma, which is the only healthy way to live. (1)

The misuse of pronouns in the above paragraph brings about confusion and ambiguity. That is, it is unclear whether the pronouns "~~them~~" in sentence 1 and "~~they~~" in sentence 3 refer to the nouns "*people*" or to "*experts*". The pronoun "*He*" in sentence 4 is also misused because there is no antecedent for it. The subordinator "*which*" in the closing sentence is also confusing because it seems to modify the noun "*trauma*", but, in fact, the writer does not intend to suggest that trauma is the only way to live.

The pronoun problems in this paragraph could be resolved by replacing the first pronoun "~~them~~" in sentence 1 with the noun "*experts*" together with the determiner "*these*". The pronoun "~~they~~" in sentence 3 could be replaced by the noun "*people*". The ambiguous subordinator "*which*" can be avoided by starting a new sentence with a precise referent.

(1) From Lefcowitz, op. cit., p.83.

Here is a possible rewritten paragraph.

¹ People today yearn to unload their problems on "experts" and let these experts tell them what to do. ² Experts can help. ³ But what people really need is a good dose of reason and common sense. ⁴ They must try to figure out why their problems exist and why they undergo personal trauma. This introspective approach is the only healthy way to live.

2.2.2. Using transition markers

In addition to the technique for achieving coherence discussed above, another helpful way to achieve coherence is by using transition markers. A transition marker is a word or word group or expression that links the idea of a preceding sentence to that of a following sentence. Using a transition marker can also make the flow of thought or ideas move smoothly from one sentence to the next, and then form a coherent paragraph. The omission of transition markers, sometimes may make a paragraph jerky and incoherent, such as in the paragraph below.

Medical science has discovered that cold viruses are transmitted from one person to another most often by hand. An infected person covers his mouth when he coughs. He picks up the telephone. His daughter picks up the telephone. She rubs her eyes. She has a cold. It spreads. (1)

The above paragraph is unified and fundamentally coherent because all details (support sentences) seem to relate to each other and be placed in a logical order. However, the relationships among the sentences are not clear and the flow of thought or ideas does not move as smoothly as it should because of the lack of transition markers.

Look at the rewritten paragraph below to find the significance of the underlined transition markers.

Medical science has discovered that cold viruses are transmitted from one person to another most often by hand. Firstly, an infected person covers his mouth when he coughs. Then, he picks up the telephone. Half an hour later, his daughter picks up the same telephone. Immediately afterward, she rubs her eyes. Within a few days, she has a cold, too. Thus, the virus spreads.

(1) Adapted from Fowler, H. Ramsey, The Little Brown Handbook, 2nd ed., Little, Brown and Company Inc. Boston, 1983, p.76.

The revised paragraph above is completely coherent with the use of transition markers that indicate chronological order: Firstly, Then, Half an hour later, Immediately afterward, Within a few days, Thus.

In the English language, there is a wide variety of transition markers to link the relationship of the idea of one sentence to the next in all kinds of writing. The following is a list of some common transition markers to be used for achieving coherence in a paragraph.

1. Transition markers indicating additional details or information about an idea already stated

_____ ; additionally, _____. Additionally, _____.
_____ ; besides, _____. Besides, _____.
_____ ; furthermore, _____. Furthermore, _____.
_____ ; in addition, _____. In addition, _____.
_____, in addition to _____. In addition to __, _____.
_____ ; moreover, _____. Moreover, _____.

again

also

equally important

in a like manner

in the same way

too.

2. Transition markers indicating cause and effect or result.

_____ ; as a result, _____. As a result, _____.
_____ ; consequently, _____. Consequently, _____.
_____ ; therefore, _____. Therefore, _____.
_____, as _____ . As _____ ,
_____ because _____ . Because _____ ,
_____ since _____ . Since _____ ,
_____, so _____ . So _____ .
_____, for _____ . For _____ , _____ .

3. Transition markers indicating emphasis of a point

_____ ; again, _____. Again, _____ .
_____ ; indeed, _____. Indeed, _____ .
_____ ; in fact, _____. In fact, _____ .
_____ ; of course, _____. Of course, _____ .
Truly, _____ .
For this purpose, _____ .
To this end, _____ .

4. Transition markers indicating example.

_____, for example. For example, _____ .
_____, for example, _____ .
_____, for instance. For instance, _____ .
_____, for instance, _____ .
_____, namely, _____ .
_____, that is, _____ . That is, _____ .

5. Transition markers indicating a comparison or a likeness
between things

_____ also _____. Also, _____.
_____, in the same way, _____. In the same way, _____.
_____, likewise, _____. Likewise, _____.
_____, similarly, _____. Similarly, _____.

6. Transition markers indicating contrast or opposition

_____ despite _____.
_____; in contrast _____.
_____ in spite of _____.
_____; still _____.
_____, yet _____.
_____; however, _____. However, _____.
_____; nevertheless, _____. Nevertheless, _____.
_____; on the contrary, _____. On the contrary, _____.
_____; on the other hand, _____. On the other hand, _____.

7. Transition markers indicating place, position, or direction

above	across	adjacent to	along
away from	behind	below	beside
between	beyond	close to	near
nearby	next to	on	opposite to
toward	through	under	underneath
in front of	at the back of	to the east	to the left
on the other side, etc.			

8. Transition markers indicating sequence of events or numerical order

After that, _____ . Afterward, _____ .
First, _____ . Firstly, _____ .
Second, _____ . Secondly, _____ .
Third, _____ . Thirdly, _____ .
Next, _____ . Last, _____ .
Lastly, _____ . Finally, _____ .
Later, _____ . Then, _____ .

9. Transition markers indicating summary or conclusion

Accordingly, _____ . Consequently, _____ .
Briefly, _____ . In brief, _____ .
In conclusion, _____ . To conclude, _____ .
In summary, _____ . To summarize, _____ .
To sum up, _____ . Thus, _____ .
In short, _____ .

10. Transition markers indicating time relationships

first	second
third	after a while
afterward	after a few days
meanwhile	immediately
at present	in the past
tomorrow	yesterday
recently	lately
since then	

It is important to use these transition markers appropriately and effectively when indicating a shift or change in thought or idea. Therefore, you have to consider each writing situation carefully when using transition markers. For example, if the preceding sentence requires an additional detail, be sure to use a transition marker that indicates addition in the sentence that follows. If two sentences involve a contrast, a transition marker that indicates contrast must be used to link the ideas of those sentences. If a conclusion is implied, then a transition marker must signal a conclusion. Using a transition marker inappropriately and illogically can confuse the reader and make a paragraph incoherent, as in the following example.

¹ *There are many ways in which people can satisfy their need to be creative.* ² *Nevertheless, some people find creative expression in dancing or playing the piano.* ³ *Moreover, other people satisfy their creative urges by cooking or writing letters. (1)*

In the paragraph above, the transition markers "Nevertheless" and "Moreover" do not make sense when they are used in this way. That is, in fact, "Nevertheless" in the second sentence indicates contrast, but there is nothing in the first sentence that shows contrast. Therefore, the second sentence does not seem to serve as an example of the first sentence, but it is. "More-

(1) From Lefcowitz, op. cit., p.86.

over" in the third sentence seems to suggest an addition to the contrast of the second sentence, but in fact, this sentence is an additional example of the first sentence. The above example can be revised as follow:

¹ *There are many ways in which people can satisfy their need to be creative.* ² *For example, some people find creative expression in dancing or playing the piano.* ³ *And other people satisfy their creative urges by cooking or writing letters.*

You should keep in mind that using transition markers precisely helps build a coherent paragraph, and that using them imprecisely may make a paragraph incoherent and create confusion and misunderstanding in the reader's mind. Thus, though transition markers may be common, they are really very important.

To sum up :

To achieve coherence in a paragraph:

1. Arrange all the details (support sentences) in a clear and logical order. There are many different ways to order your details; your choice will depend on the nature of your subject (topic) and your purpose in writing. Very often, the nature of the subject will automatically guide you as to which type of order is most suitable for arranging your details.
2. Make clear relationships among sentences by using precise pronoun reference and appropriate transition markers. There are many kinds of pronoun reference, and transition marker. Using them precisely and appropriately can help make a paragraph coherent.
3. Do not rely on only one way for achieving coherence; try to order your sentences in accordance with precise pronoun reference and appropriate transition markers.

3. Exercises about coherence

Exercise 1.

Directions: The following paragraphs were coherent as they were originally written, but the order of some sentences has been changed. Revise these paragraphs for greater coherence by arranging all the details in a logical order in the space provided. There is no set order, so you must justify your choice.

Paragraph 1.

Naturally, the weather in Thailand falls into three climatic seasons, each of which lasts for four months. The first one is the hot or dry season. The weather during this season is very hot, especially in April. It starts at the beginning of March and continues until the end of June. The second one is the wet or rainy season. So the weather during this season is rather wet and humid. Rain always falls all over the country. It begins at the beginning of July and lasts until the end of October. The last one is the cold or winter season. The weather during this season is very cool and comfortable. It starts at the beginning of November and lasts until the end of February. That is, it is neither too cold nor too hot.

Write your coherent paragraph here.

Paragraph 2.

To keep yourself healthy, you should follow the following advice. First, you should take care of your eating and drinking. In addition, drinking liquor must be avoided. You should eat high protein food in neither too small nor too large quantities at regular times. You should drink at least 8 glasses of water a day. Second, you should exercise regularly. You may jog in the fresh air in the morning or the evening. You may also join a sports organization that you like. That is, you should sleep at least 8 hours per night. Third, you should get enough rest. Moreover, the quantity of work to be done should be balanced with the time for rest.

Write your coherent paragraph here.

Paragraph 3.

American women have been fighting for equal rights for 100 years. In 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment to the constitution was adopted. This amendment gave women the right to vote. In 1976 the U.S. military academies admitted women for the first time. Women began to fight for better working conditions in New York in 1868. Women were still fighting to get the Equal Rights Amendment passed in 1980. Congress passed an act forbidding discrimination on the basis of sex by employers of fifteen or more employees in 1964. (1)

(1) Adapted from Smalley, op. cit., p.111.

Write your coherent paragraph here.

Exercise 2.

Directions: Fill the blanks with appropriate pronoun references and transition markers to make the following paragraphs coherent.

Paragraph 1.

Overpopulation is one of the greatest problems of India. _____ Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister, _____ tried to solve _____ problem by convincing poor people in rural areas to practice birth control. _____, she promised that if a man would agree to have surgery so that _____ could have no more children, he would receive a free transistor radio. Many men agreed, but only after _____ had ten or

more children. Mrs. Gandhi _____ attempted to force poor women to agree to have an operation so that _____ could have no more children. _____ caused so much opposition against _____, _____ the problem had to be forgotten, and has never been solved. (1)

Paragraph 2.

To be a good leader, one should have at least three leadership qualities. _____, _____ should have a good personality. _____ quality can help him succeed in his work _____ he contacts other people _____ of the fact that people always rely on, or are attracted by, a good personality. _____, he should be well-versed. _____ means that _____ should have a lot of knowledge in the profession he is practicing. With _____ knowledge he can solve unexpected problems and carry out _____ duties successfully and effectively. Morality is the _____ and the most important quality _____ a leader should acquire. _____ applies to his responsibility and honesty in his profession or duty, including generosity and justice to the people _____ are under _____ leadership.

(1) Adapted from Reid, op. cit., p.90.

Exercise 3.

Directions: Read the paragraph concerning spatial order on page 56. Draw a diagram of the room that is described there. Write in all the things that are mentioned in that paragraph.

