

## Coherence and flow in writing

Coherence refers to the logical flow of ideas, sentences, clauses and phrases. We will consider one important means of coherence, and then look at typical problems of East Asian writers with transitionals (connectors), as well as other transitional devices.

### 1. Foregrounding and backgrounding

Some material can be summarized more briefly, and also phrased in certain grammatical structures to de-emphasize it (backgrounding), so that it leads up to the more important content; the more important information can be put in a main clause for more emphasis. Subordinate clauses [종속절] are particularly useful for backgrounding less critical information to connect with and lead up to important information in the main clause [주절].

#### 1.1. Subordination vs. coordinate clauses [등위절]

Consider the following versions of these sentences. In what way do they sound differently or flow differently?

- 1a. I ran the simulation, and then the problem became apparent.
- 1b. After I ran the simulation, the problem became apparent.
  
- 2a. We ran 40 subjects in the experiment, but it yielded no conclusive results.
- 3b. Although we ran 40 subjects in the experiment, it yielded no conclusive results.
  
- 3a. Gender turned out to have a significant effect in past studies, so it was entered as a control variable.
- 3b. Because gender turned out to have a significant effect in past studies, it was entered as a control variable.

Sentences fall into a few basic grammatical types: [1] simple sentences, consisting of one dependent clause; [2] compound sentences, composed of two or more main clauses, i.e., coordinate clauses; [3] complex sentences, composed of a main clause and a dependent clause; and [4] compound-complex, consisting of three or more clauses: 1+ main clause(s) and 1+ dependent clause(s).

Skilled writers use a mixture of such sentences, sometimes using shorter sentences for drawing attention to key ideas, and longer sentences for developing ideas. The number and variety of such structures depends on individual writing style, genre (the type of work that one is writing), and the type of field or research area.

## 1.2. Other backgrounding devices

### [a] Prepositional phrases

For the sake of equity and fairness in educational opportunities, students are randomly assigned to a school in their district, and teachers are regularly rotated among schools throughout the metropolitan area

### [b] Participle phrases

Finding past motivation studies based solely on questionnaire data inadequate, Smith and Jones (2008) used a hybrid observational and survey study paradigm.

### [c] Infinitive and gerund phrases

To provide equal educational opportunities, ...

Implementing a rotation system was found to be effective...

### [d] Subordinate clauses

Although they decided upon a one-factor solution based on the PCA results, the second eigenvalue may be too close to significance to dismiss right away.

Since they found past studies based solely on questionnaire data inadequate, Smith and Jones (2008) decided on a hybrid observational and survey study paradigm.

### [e] More common, general wording

A slight degree of foregrounding can be achieved by using strong, active verbs with specific meanings; and specific, full noun phrases, especially as subjects. Conversely, a slight degree of backgrounding can be achieved in word choice by using [1] light verbs – common verbs with general meanings, such as *have, be, go, set, give, do, make, set, take*; [2] passive verbs with no agent (no *by*-phrase); and [3] verbs of state and descriptive verbs.

The message was short and contained nothing new; it seemed redundant. Since it was sent from a legacy account, we will give it no further consideration.

## 2. Paraphrasing and summarizing techniques<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1. Selecting and omitting information

When citing and using information from a source for their own academic writings, novice writers may make the mistake of including too much information from the source, including unnecessary details and items that are not relevant to the purpose of the paper. Experienced writers leave out less important information from the source article, such as:

- background information, historical background, or theoretical background that the potential readers would likely know already
- minor details of experimental design and procedures
- statistical results of experiments
- details of the author's line of reasoning in his/her analysis
- any information that is not relevant to the main point of the writer's paper

Instead, the main findings, conclusions, or implications are usually the focus of the summarized / paraphrased information. Based on what is included or omitted, writers then condense and restructure sentences.

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<sup>1</sup> For this and related handouts, see the seminar website, [www.tinyurl.com/kuctlemi](http://www.tinyurl.com/kuctlemi).

## 2.2. Altering content words

The main meaning-bearing words – nouns, main verbs, adjectives, adverbs – are changed as much as possible with synonyms or rephrasing – except for key terms and technical terms. Content words may be replaced with synonyms or other referring expressions; e.g., “this claim / hypothesis” and “this situation / context / issue / etc.” or simply “this.”

## 2.3. Altering sentence structure

### [a] Serial verb phrases

Several sentences can be condensed into one sentence with multiple verb phrases, including passive verbs (second example).

They observed English classes at a number of secondary schools in Seoul, coded the teacher and student behavior, and administered questionnaires to the students.

English teachers were recruited, their English classes at various schools were observed, teacher and student behaviors were coded, and questionnaires were administered to the students.

### [b] Reporting verbs

Reporting and communication verbs indicate cited information and ideas, e.g.:

X suggests / reported / observed / recommends / implied that...

### [c] Attributive adjectives

Some information can be reduced to descriptive adjectives and noun phrases.

A standard counterbalanced experimental design was used. [substituting for several sentences describing how the experiment was done]

This recent proposal...

Such economic disparity...

### [d] Nominalizations [명사화, 名詞化]

Entire phrases, ideas and even sentences can often be reduced to shorter noun phrases or even single nouns, and this is common in technical and academic writing. For example:

simple	nominalization
they applied connectionist modeling in order to analyzing how the mind processes dreams	their application of connectionist modeling to the analysis of dream processing
how we directed the research; the direction that our research took	the direction of our research
The military invented the ARPANET, which allowed people to disseminate information like never before	The military's invention of the ARPANET revolutionized the dissemination of information
Obviously the government is concerned about how some users will react if it tries to impose restrictions on Internet usage.	Obviously the government is concerned about some users' reactions to a potential move to impose restrictions on Internet usage.

### 3. Transitionals

Look at the following and identify the stylistic problems with these sentences, or stylistic improvements that could be made.

#### 3.1. Adverb placement

1. They had planned very well and even defeated Pearl Harbor utterly.
2. The information is various from the exchange rate and stock prices and to the current of national economy. Especially, economic predictions are useful to make a plan for long-term economic policy for several reasons.
3. Especially the negative aspect of the violence is living in the mind of young people.

#### 3.2. Complex sentence structure

4. Bilingual education can have a positive influence on young children's cognitive development and academic development in second language learning. Because one study (Cambell & Sais, 1995) found that bilingual children have shown advantages in cognitive and linguistic levels before going to school.
5. [a] Gender turned out to have a significant effect in past studies, so it was entered as a control variable. *cf.*  
[b] Because gender turned out to have a significant effect in past studies, it was entered as a control variable.
6. Paintings tend to use muted and cool colors. The background is light while the middle distance is dark and the foreground figures in the light. The shininess, weight and patterns of textiles can still be considered rendered, but details become less important. Pastel chalk, which forbids both mixing pigments for exact color rendering and clearly defined lines, gains popularity and gives a soft appearance to portraits. Portraits painted during the 18th century abound. Many are excellent sources of information, but individual artists sometimes felt that portraits demanded timeless rather than fashionable dress (Tortora & Eubank, 1999).

#### 3.3. Contrastive markers

7. But, statistics show the greatest escape rates from poverty by welfare benefits.
8. It sounds like that it is very boring place, but, it's very good for students because they are able to concentrate on only their study.
9. America and Korea have many cultural differences. Because of this, people who visit America or Korea for the first time are easy to be confused. Although there are many western cultures that Korea has received from America, still there are many different cultures that cannot be changed.
10. The book offers nothing in terms of a satisfactory conclusion to the problem.

#### 3.4. Topic transitionals

11. In case of daylight, it is composed equal intensity of color light in visible spectrum.
12. In case of Turkey, if the buildings were designed by proper method, the severe calamity could be reduced.
13. With regard to this symptom, I have same experience.

14. Second, in Korea, there is no specific high-stake for graduating a junior and a high school. ...Third, most of students in the U.S.A. have not improved learning in a school.
15. However, there is no fundamental limitation to OLEDs efficiencies.
16. Although there are many Western cultures that Korea has received from America, still there are many different cultures that cannot be changed.

### 3.5. Other transitionals

17. A conference trip to Hawaii is unaffordable. Besides, the daily expenses there would exceed the departmental allowances for daily expenses.
18. The first step of the scoring processes is to decide whether or not a sentence in the summary is a reproduced sentence or a combined sentence.
19. When reading, the subjects indicated that they attempted to recognize the rhetorical patterns, e.g., description, comparison, causation, etc.

### 3.6. Resumption markers

20. Anyway, many have pointed out serious side effects.

Occasionally, a writer needs to repeat familiar information, e.g., [1] to return to a line of thought; or [2] to cite somewhat familiar background information to transition to a new line of reasoning or topic. This is marked with a subordinating conjunction (*Although X has argued at length that...*) or a resumption marker (*as mentioned, the aforementioned X, as regards, as to, regarding*). This should not be overly familiar information, and it should be concise and not too redundant. In formal writing, *as regards, as to, as for, regarding* should not be used too often, as this can sound colloquial or redundant. Instead, paragraph breaks, or simply sentences with full noun subjects are used to shift or reshift topics.

As discussed previously, many physicists have pointed out serious side effects, even fatal risks, of warp drive engines. However, we would like to propose alternatives to the standard warp drive that would avoid these dangers.

OR

Many physicists have pointed out serious side effects, even fatal risks, of such warp drive engines.

Many physicists have pointed out serious side effects, even fatal risks, of the aforementioned warp drive engines.

## 4. Transitionals: Information flow and management

As above, transitional or connective words not only facilitate logical flow and connections among ideas, phrases, and clauses, but they also can help to manage the information being cited.

Some have claimed that theory Y offers a better explanation than theory X. For example, Smith (2008) found that... Further evidence is offered by Jones (2009), who observed that... In fact, most recent studies have provided stronger evidence for Y.

Since they found past studies based solely on questionnaire data inadequate, ...

Sometimes it is necessary to critique, criticize, or take issue with others' claims or findings. Contrastive connectives like *however, although, whereas* and others can help to frame such information and distinguish between the cited information and your own critique.

Although they decided upon a one-factor solution based on the PCA results, the second eigenvalue may be too close to significance to dismiss right away.

The researchers reported the results of a factor analysis of the survey data, and concluded that one underlying factor (a general class motivation factor) was apparent from the survey data. However, their reported eigenvalue of 1.8 for the first factor was twice the value for a possible second factor” – yet a second factor of c. 0.9 might also be significant.

## 5. Sentence transitional devices

### 5.1. Sentence adverbs

Some adverbs occur sentence-initially and indicate the speaker’s attitude or intention toward the sentence. Some of these are more colloquial or informal.

actually, apparently, basically, by the way, briefly, certainly, clearly, conceivably, confidentially, curiously, especially, evidently, essentially, fortunately, hopefully, hypothetically, ideally, incidentally, indeed, interestingly, ironically, naturally, oddly, predictably, presumably, realistically, regrettably, seriously, strangely, surprisingly, thankfully, theoretically, therefore, truthfully, ultimately, unfortunately, wisely

For example:

Apparently, an overwhelming majority in the Senate would be assured, if they can win seats in North Carolina, Minnesota, and Mississippi.

### 5.2. Topical adverbs

Similarly, topic adverbs comment on the theme or interpretation of the sentence.

aesthetically, analytically, anthropologically, artistically, biologically, computationally, economically, emotionally, environmentally, ethically, financially, etiologically, evolutionarily, hypothetically, intellectually, mathematically, medically, numerically, philosophically, physically, politically, psychologically, presently, scientifically, sociologically, statistically, theoretically, zoologically

*E.g.:* Economically, this would be infeasible to implement while the markets are too unstable. (cf. “This would be economically infeasible to implement.”)

### 5.3. Inversion

For the first section the following paragraph, discuss the two possible conclusions. Does one sound better, or somehow different, from the other?

Aging is a process that begins long before retirement. In old age we feel the effects of decades of lifestyle habits. These include healthy living habits as well as experiences in dealing with illness or emotional crises, the ability to resolve conflicts, interests, lucidity and openness towards new things, support offered by family, friends or neighbors, as well as financial savings or housing arrangements. For many of these areas, thinking ahead reduces worries later on<sup>2</sup>.

Which ending to the above paragraph sounds better? Or how do these sound different?

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from <http://www.hear-the-world.com/en/experience-hearing.html>.

1. Social relationships are particularly important, as stable and resilient networks of relationships are elderly people's primary source of practical and emotional support in their daily lives.
2. Particularly important are social relationships, as stable and resilient networks of relationships are elderly people's primary source of practical and emotional support in their daily lives.

Would #2 work as a conclusion to the following paragraph?

3. Aging brings unique challenges and needs. Joints and muscles become sore for no apparent reason. More frequent medical visits and checkups become necessary. Income becomes more limited. Particularly important are social relationships, as stable and resilient networks of relationships are elderly people's primary source of practical and emotional support in their daily lives.

The second option above uses inversion – putting the subject after the verb, and putting another phrase before the verb – an adverb, adjective, participle, or prepositional phrase. Here are other examples of this structure.

1. You are working on an important research project that you want to finish and get published, as publishing it will likely land you the job that you want. But along comes a rival contender with similar research, threatening to “scoop” you<sup>3</sup>.
2. You plan to present some great research findings at a major conference. But lurking at the conference is a rival contender, planning to present similar research, threatening to “scoop” you.
3. Particularly important was the finding that the treatment had no effect at higher doses.
4. Much less expected was the finding that subjects not remember seeing even the stimulus presented at the longest duration.
5. Rather more significant was the interaction effects between the two variables.
6. Especially noteworthy is the finding that patients recovered 20% more quickly in the treatment condition.
7. Of greater concern / importance is the fact that the treatment had adverse effects on patients' moods.
8. More interesting are inverted sentences, like this one.

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3 Scoop: To get an exclusive on a story, to publish something first, to beat others in publishing something new (journalism / newspaper slang).

## 6. Parallel structures

Consistent structure and wording with complex sentences is needed for smooth flow. Please refer to the extra handout on parallel structures.

**Not Parallel:** The teacher said that he was a poor student because he waited until the last minute to study for the exam, completed his lab problems in a careless manner, and his motivation was low.

**Parallel:** The teacher said that he was a poor student because he waited until the last minute to study for the exam, completed his lab problems in a careless manner, and lacked motivation.

**Not Parallel:** The sales expected that he would present his product at the meeting, that there would be time for him to show his slide presentation, and that questions would be asked by prospective buyers. (passive verb)

**Parallel:** The sales representative expected that he would present his product at the meeting, that there would be time for him to show his slide presentation, and that prospective buyers would ask him questions.