Weaving Ideas Together:
Flow and Coherence in Your Writing

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Learning Outcomes

By the end of this presentation, you should be able to:

- Recognize the strategies that good writers use to create flow and coherence.
- Use three of these key strategies to increase flow, coherence and readability in your writing.
Overview of Screencast

1. Define flow and coherence
2. Discuss several methods that writers use to create flow and coherence
3. Focus on three of these key strategies
   - Repetition
   - Old-new information pattern
   - Signal words
4. Focus on combining strategies to improve flow and coherence
5. Read strong and weak student paragraphs
Definitions of Flow and Coherence

- **Flow** is the way words in a sentence connect to those that follow.
- **Coherence** is the overall organization, order of ideas and cohesion contained in a piece of writing.
Reorder the Sentences in this Paragraph

1. Their house caught fire and burnt to the ground.
2. From great wealth, the merchant fell into the direst poverty.
3. However, one day the family experienced a misfortune.
4. He spent his money lavishly on his six sons and six daughters, who never lacked for anything.
5. Lost in the fire were all the family’s precious goods, gold and silver.
6. Then, he heard that his clerks in distant countries, whom he trusted entirely, had stolen from him.
7. Once upon a time in a far-off country, there lived a merchant who had been so lucky in his undertakings that he was enormously rich.
8. The week following the fire, the merchant heard that his ships had been set upon and destroyed by pirates. ¹
Sentences in the Correct Order

7. Once upon a time in a far-off country, there lived a merchant who had been so lucky in his undertakings that he was enormously rich.

4. He spent his money lavishly on his six sons and six daughters, who never lacked for anything.

3. However, one day the family experienced a misfortune.

1. Their house caught fire and burnt to the ground.

5. Lost in the fire were all the family’s precious goods, gold and silver.

8. The week following the fire, the merchant heard that his ships had been set upon and destroyed by pirates.

6. Then, he heard that his clerks in distant countries, whom he trusted entirely, had stolen from him.

2. From great wealth, the merchant fell into the direst poverty. 

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Three Key Strategies to Create Flow and Coherence

1. Repeat key words and forms of words.
2. Use the old-new information flow or pattern.
3. Use signal words strategically.
Strategy 1: Repeat Key Words and Forms of Words

Research has shown that caffeine [reduces] sleepiness and can lead to better academic performance. Despite its effectiveness in counteracting sleepiness, caffeine can have a negative impact on subsequent sleep, which for many students may already be compromised. Specifically, caffeinated beverages consumed near bedtime ... can prolong sleep onset and reduce sleep efficiency and depth, thus affecting both sleep quality and duration. Most of the research on how caffeine affects sleepiness and alertness has focused on coffee or no-doze pills. However, a new kind of caffeinated drink has become increasingly popular, namely functional energy drinks ... ²
Strategy 1: An Example from a Student’s Proposal

Access to safe **drinking water** is essential for human health, yet natural processes and human activities often put **drinking water** sources at risk (AANDC, 2013; Patrick, 2014). **Drinking water** protection varies greatly across Canada (Wood, C., 2014), but it is particularly weak in First Nation communities. In 2010, 75% of First Nation on-reserve **water** systems assessed posed a threat to human health (Simms, Lightman, & de Loë, 2010). This situation is ongoing. As of March, 2016, there were 133 short- and long-term **drinking water** advisories in 89 First Nation communities across the country, with 23 in Saskatchewan alone (Health Canada, 2016). ... ³
Strategy 2: Use the Old-New Information Pattern

Definition of the old-new information pattern

- The old-new information pattern is a method for organizing sentences, paragraphs and papers.

- This method involves placing old information (information that the reader already has some familiarity with) at the beginning of the sentence (before the verb) and placing new information after the verb.

- Using this method, the flow of ideas resembles links in a chain.
Strategy #2: Example of the Old-New Information Pattern

The Operation of a Nuclear Power Plant

A nuclear power plant (OLD) contains a nuclear reactor that uses controlled nuclear fission to produce electricity (NEW). The reactor (OLD) consists of fuel rods alternating with control rods inside a large container called a reactor core (NEW). The fuel rods (OLD) contain radioactive fuel (NEW) and the control rods (OLD) contain neutron-absorbing substances (NEW)... 4
Strategy #2: Example of the Old-New Information Pattern (Cont’d)

As the world’s population grows, the demands for freshwater have been increasing (NEW). Along with this increase (OLD) is growing pressure to protect this precious resource (NEW). Efforts to protect the water supply (OLD) have traditionally focused on regulating industrial and municipal waste that is discharged into rivers and lakes (NEW).
Is the Old-New Pattern Used?

Research has shown that caffeine [reduces] sleepiness and can lead to better academic performance. Despite its effectiveness in counteracting sleepiness, caffeine can have a negative impact on subsequent sleep, which for many students may already be compromised. Specifically, caffeinated beverages consumed near bedtime ... can prolong sleep onset and reduce sleep efficiency and depth, thus affecting both sleep quality and duration. Most of the research on how caffeine affects sleepiness and alertness has focused on coffee or no-doze pills. However, a new kind of caffeinated drink has become increasingly popular, namely functional energy drinks. ... ²
Is the Old-New Pattern Used?

Part of the Introduction to Beauty and the Beast

However, one day the family experienced a misfortune. Their house caught fire and burnt to the ground. Lost in the fire were all the family’s precious goods, gold and silver. The week following the fire, the merchant heard that his ships had been set upon and destroyed by pirates. ... ¹
How About in This Revised Version?

Part of the Introduction to Beauty and the Beast

However, one day the family experienced a misfortune. Their house caught fire and burnt to the ground. All the family’s precious goods, gold and silver were lost in the fire. The merchant heard that his ships had been set upon and destroyed by pirates the week following the fire.
Which Version is Easier to Read? Why?

Version One

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists exploring the nature of black holes in space. The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole.

Version Two

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists exploring the nature of black holes in space. A black hole is created by the collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble. 6
Old-New Pattern: “This/These + Noun”

One method for using the old-new pattern is to start a new sentence with “this” or “these” plus a noun that describes the idea expressed in the previous sentence. This phrase should come before the second sentence’s main verb.

- Sykes and Wilson (2012) found that short bursts of intense exercise showed more benefits than longer but less intense workouts. **This finding** is consistent with those of others researchers. ...

- Most election models assume a rational voter who makes careful, well-informed decisions. Since the election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States, **this view** has been severely challenged.
### General Nouns to Use With “This/These”

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Avoid Starting a Sentence with “This/These” Alone or “It”

✗ When chicken embryos die during incubation, hatchery producers suffer economic losses. *This* occurs for two reasons.

✗ When chicken embryos die during incubation, hatchery producers suffer economic losses. *It* occurs for two main reasons.

✓ When chicken embryos die during incubation, hatchery producers suffer economic losses. *These losses* occur for two reasons.

✓ Hatchery producers suffer economic losses when chicken embryos die during incubation. *These deaths* occur for two reasons.
Two Patterns of Old-New Information Flow

1. The old information comes from the previous sentence

Bioremediation is the use of microorganisms to remove contaminants from the environment. This process is widely considered as an effective remediation technology ... 8

2. The old information comes from the topic sentence

The literature on compensation is based on three theories: reinforcement theory, expectancy theory and equity theory. Reinforcement theory (Skinner, 1938) suggests that individuals perform well if they receive an award today. Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) states that individuals perform well today if they are expecting a future reward. Equity theory ... 9
Strategy 3: Use Signal Words Strategically

Common Signal Words and Phrases

Addition: and; in addition (to); additionally; also; another; as well (as); moreover; furthermore

Cause and effect: so; because (of); since; as a result (of); therefore; thus; due to; consequently; as a consequence; for this reason; for all these reasons

Clarification: in other words; that is; put another way

Concession: but; although; despite; in spite of; notwithstanding; nevertheless; however; yet
Strategy 3: Use Signal Words Strategically

Common Signal Words and Phrases Continued

**Contrast:** but; while; whereas; in contrast (to); however; although; on the other hand; contrary to; conversely; unlike; yet; in opposition to; rather than; instead (of)

**Illustration:** for example; for instance; to illustrate; such as; including

**Intensification:** in fact; on the contrary; indeed

**Sequence:** first; second; third; then; next; after

**Similarity:** similarly; similar (to); likewise; corresponding (to); in accordance (with); both ... and; like; related (to)

**Specificity:** in particular; particularly; especially; specifically
Common Problems with Signal Words

1. They are omitted

✗ Indigenous people’s traditional knowledge is now recognized by most scientists and governments. Some people are skeptical about the value of this knowledge.

✓ Indigenous people’s traditional knowledge is now recognized by most scientists and governments; however, some people are skeptical about the value of this knowledge.  


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Common Problems with Signal Words (Continued)

2. Too many are used

In addition, the world’s increasing population requires more land to grow more food. Consequently, pressure on non-human species is increasing because their habitat is being cultivated for crops. Therefore, technological advancement to increase yields on existing lands is vital to avoid encroaching further onto animal habitat. However, boosting crop yields requires the use of pesticides and genetically modified seeds, but many environmental groups are opposed to this. However, as long as governments implement innovative policies that ensure the safe use of technology, both animal habitat and the world’s food supply will be protected. 11
Combine Signal Words with the Old-New Pattern

- For this reason ...
- For (all) these reasons ...
- As a result of this/these plus noun ... (As a result of this ruling ...)
- Because of this/these plus noun ... (Because of these recent developments)
- Due to this/these plus noun ... (Due to this change)
- Despite/in spite of this/these plus noun (Despite this upward trend in the average income of Canadians, ...)
- Notwithstanding this/these plus noun ... (Notwithstanding this improvement)
Combine Signal Words with Old-new Pattern (Cont’d)

- In contrast to plus noun ... (In contrast to Jones’s findings, ... )
- Contrary to this/these plus noun ... (Contrary to the position of Rowe and Smith, ... )
- Unlike plus noun ... (Unlike earlier research in this field, ... )
- Although this/these plus noun ... (Although this development has hindered the creation of water safety guidelines, ... )
- Similar to plus noun ... (Similar to Li’s study, ... )
- Rather than/instead of plus noun/gerund ... (Rather than allowing water to escape from the posterior valves, Minelli’s model ... )
Combine Signal Words with Old-New Pattern (Cont’d)

Use a signal word or phrase with “this/these + noun”

✗ The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery because most of the eye tissue is transparent. The frequency and focus of the beam can be adjusted according to the absorption of the tissue.

✓ The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery since most of the eye tissue is transparent. Because of this transparency, the frequency and focus of the beam can be adjusted according to the absorption of the tissue. ¹²
How Would You Evaluate the Flow in This Passage?

In the 1980s, English became the world’s most widely spoken second language. Since then, its use has increased exponentially, extending to all parts of the globe. This rapid growth is expected to continue so that by 2040, at least half the world’s population will be conversant in English. Despite its widespread use, English is a complicated language with numerous dialects and pronunciation patterns, complex grammar, irregular verbs and multiple exceptions to rules.
Freshwater ecosystems can only be sustained through stakeholder participation and collaboration. Different techniques have been tried in in recent years to improve the quality of freshwater resources. Computer-based processes and community-based studies are examples of collaborative efforts. The degradation of freshwater resources may be halted through the novel solutions and technologies that have been proposed. Problems can typically be seen from a much broader perspective and solutions to mutual problems can be developed when an entire team of stakeholders engage with others to solve a problem, despite certain challenges.

Interdisciplinary research is critical to the search for solutions to complicated socio-environmental problems. ...
How About in This One?

Freshwater ecosystems can only be sustained through stakeholder participation and collaboration. In recent years, stakeholders have tried different techniques to improve the quality of freshwater resources. Stakeholders have collaborated with a variety of experts and participated in computer-based processes and community-based studies. These efforts have led to novel solutions and technologies that may halt the degradation of freshwater resources. Despite challenges, when stakeholders engage with others to solve a problem facing the entire team, they typically see it from a broader perspective and are motivated to work with others to find solutions.

In addition to stakeholder engagement, interdisciplinary research is critical to the search for solutions to complicated socio-environmental problems. ... 14
Summary

- Repeat key words and forms of words. Repetition focuses readers on key words and ideas.
- Use the old-new information pattern. This should be your main strategy.
- Use signal words strategically. Use them to guide the reader and to pivot to a new idea when you can’t use the old-new information pattern.
- Combine strategies. Use a signal word with the old-new information pattern to improve flow and coherence.
Endnotes


3 Courtesy of a former student


Endnotes


7, 8, 9, 10, 11  Courtesy of a former student.


13, 14  Courtesy of a former student.