

THE TAPESTRY OF TEXT: WEAVING COHESION AND COHERENCE INTO MEANINGFUL WRITING

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ANNOTATION:

Every successful piece of writing, from a novel to a technical report, relies on two fundamental principles to guide the reader from confusion to comprehension: cohesion and coherence. While often used interchangeably in casual discourse, these terms represent distinct layers of textual unity. Understanding their individual roles, and more importantly, their complex relationship, is crucial for any effective writer. Simply put, cohesion is the visible stitching that holds the sentences together, while coherence is the underlying design that makes the entire tapestry meaningful. The central challenge, or the "problem of correlation," lies in the fact that a text can be rich in one yet poor in the other, leading to a breakdown in communication.

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Cohesion is the grammatical and lexical machinery operating on the surface of a text. It creates tangible links between words, phrases, and sentences. Linguists, primarily following the model of Halliday and Hasan, categorize cohesion into several types:

1. Reference: This involves using words that point to something else in the text for their interpretation. It's a verbal "pointing finger."

— Personal Reference: Pronouns like he, she, it, they, and possessives like his, her, their. (e.g., "Maria finished the report. She submitted it immediately.")

— Demonstrative Reference: Words like this, that, these, those, which signal proximity. (e.g., "The company faced significant losses. This led to a restructuring.")

— Comparative Reference: Words like same, other, similar, different, which create links through comparison. (e.g., "His first argument was compelling. The next one was even stronger.")

2. Conjunction: This type of cohesion uses linking words to express logical relationships between parts of a text. It tells the reader how ideas connect.

— Additive: and, furthermore, in addition.

— Adversative: but, however, on the other hand.

— Causal: because, therefore, as a result.

— Temporal: then, next, finally, subsequently.

3. **Lexical Cohesion:** This is achieved through vocabulary choice, creating a network of related words.

Repetition: Directly repeating a key word or phrase. (e.g., “The problem was identified. Solving the problem required innovation.”)

Synonymy/Antonymy: Using words with similar or opposite meanings. (e.g., “The task was difficult. The challenge required immense focus.”)

Hyponymy: Using general (superordinate) and specific (hyponym) terms. (e.g., “The furniture was antique. The armchair was particularly valuable.”)

Collocation: Using words that frequently occur together based on convention. (e.g., “scientific breakthrough,” “heavy rain”).

4. **Substitution and Ellipsis:** These are more grammatical in nature.

Substitution: Replacing a word or phrase with another word like “one, do, or so”. (e.g., “I need a new phone. This old one is broken.”)

Ellipsis: Omitting a word or phrase that is understood from the context. (e.g., “Who wants tea?” “[I] Do”). These devices are the writer’s toolbox for creating a smooth, flowing text at the sentence level. They are the explicit signals that prevent writing from feeling like a disjointed list of statements.

If cohesion is the thread, coherence is the pattern woven from it. Coherence is not a feature of the text itself but a mental phenomenon experienced by the reader. It is the perception that the text makes sense as a whole, that it has a logical flow and a unified purpose. Coherence is built upon:

— **Logical Consistency:** Ideas are arranged in a rational order, such as cause-and-effect, problem-solution, or chronological sequence. The reader can follow the writer’s train of thought.

— **Thematic Unity:** The text has a clear topic or thesis that is developed and maintained throughout. Every paragraph and sentence contributes to this central theme.

— **Completeness:** The text provides sufficient information for the reader to make necessary inferences without being overwhelmed by irrelevant details.

— **Use of World Knowledge and Schemas:** Coherence heavily relies on the reader’s ability to bring outside knowledge to the text. A recipe’s instructions (“Chop onions. Heat oil.”) are coherent because we activate our “cooking schema” to fill in the gaps. The fundamental problem is that cohesion and coherence do not have a guaranteed one-to-one relationship. The presence of cohesive devices does not automatically create a coherent text, and a text can be coherent with minimal cohesion.

The Illusion of Unity: High Cohesion, Low Coherence

A text can be grammatically perfect, filled with pronouns, conjunctions, and repetition, yet be utterly nonsensical. This demonstrates that cohesion is a necessary but not

sufficient condition for coherence. For instance: “The economic policy was implemented. It was designed to curb inflation. However, inflation continued to rise. This surprised the ministers because their model predicted a different outcome. Furthermore, the data was rechecked.”

Analysis: This paragraph is highly cohesive. Yet, it lacks a coherent argument. It simply states a sequence of events without explaining the failure, exploring causes, or drawing a meaningful conclusion. The cohesive devices create an illusion of connection, but the underlying logic is absent.

Conversely, a text with few explicit cohesive links can be perfectly coherent if the reader can easily infer the logical connections based on context and shared knowledge. For example (from a novel): “*The train arrived. The platform was empty. A single light flickered. Wind whipped through the deserted station.*”

Analysis: There are no conjunctions or pronouns linking these sentences. However, the reader effortlessly constructs a coherent scene—a bleak, lonely arrival. The coherence comes from our knowledge of train stations and the cumulative effect of the imagery (empty, flickered, whipped, deserted). The logical connection is implied, not stated.

In conclusion, the correlation between cohesion and coherence is not automatic; it is managed by the writer. The problem for the writer is to avoid mistaking one for the other. Over-reliance on cohesive devices can lead to clumsy, repetitive prose that lacks a clear point—a text that is “well-connected” but meaningless. Under-reliance can place too much burden on the reader, potentially leading to ambiguity. Therefore, effective writing requires a dual focus. First, the writer must construct a coherent framework—a solid, logical structure of ideas. Second, they must use cohesive devices strategically to signpost that structure, guiding the reader smoothly through the argument or narrative. The goal is not to maximize cohesion, but to use it judiciously to illuminate the pre-existing coherence, ensuring that the reader sees not just the individual threads, but the beautiful, intelligible tapestry they are meant to form.

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