

## Effective sentence and paragraph structure to create good flow



Dr Julia Rayner  
Centre for Teaching and Learning  
Contributions from Centre for Teaching and Learning  
Albany Campus

## Clarity

- The mutant CB2 heterologously overexpressed the P alpha gene, low levels of ABD activities were found
- Drazmix, so that it could increase its popularity amongst young users, in 2000 began a subtle campaign targeting university students
- The cause of our students' failure in academic writing is not understanding the importance of basic grammatical structures
- Our students fail in academic writing because they do not understand how important grammatical structures are

## Rules of clarity

- Subjects (characters) are short and specific
- Verbs express specific actions carried out by the subjects (the action characters are part of)
- Use of abstract nouns derived from verbs or adjectives (nominalisation) makes writing hard work
- Analysis      Expression
- Failure      Definition
- Evaluation      Examination
- Explanation      Belief
- Appearance      Improvements

## Look out for

- Abstract nouns as simple subjects
  - At least 6-7 words before getting to a verb
    - Rewrite the sentences using conjunctions like because, if, whether, that, how, although
- Verbs with little meaning (conduct, carry out..)  
There is/are (There was damage of infrastructure from the earthquake)

## Examples

- There has been speculation by financial advisers that ...
- There is a need for finance companies to conduct an analysis of the credit card usage amongst consumers.

## Task 1

Johnson carried out a study to look at the effect of ....  
Johnson studied the effect of  
Smith conducted a review of the literature  
Smith reviewed the literature  
Carey carried out an analysis of the development of language  
Carey analysed the development of language  
A revision of our schedule will result in an increase in efficiency in handling requests  
If we revise the schedule we can handle requests more efficiently  
The outsourcing of telecommunications work to Asia by large companies means the loss of jobs for many European workers  
Many European workers are losing their jobs because companies are outsourcing their telecommunications work to Asia

- (Williams, 2005)

The department's inability to exert cost controls could lead to the CEO's decision that HR intervention is needed  
 The CEO may decide that HR must intervene because the department cannot control costs  
 There was speculation by financial experts that the economy would experience a slow regeneration  
 Financial experts speculated that the economy would revive slowly  
 There is great variation in methods of recording data  
 Methods of recording data vary greatly  
 The intention of the IRD is to collect information on fraudulent claims  
 The IRD intends to collect information on  
 There was a review of the progress of the millennium goals by relevant governments  
 Governments reviewed how the mg's were progressing  
 (Williams, 2005)

## When noun forms are useful

- Because we lacked evidence, we could not evaluate whether the teachers' had targeted resources to students that most needed assistance. This lack of evidence could prevent.....
- Many European workers are losing their jobs because companies are outsourcing their telecommunications work to Asia. These losses are putting pressure
- Because the department cannot control costs, the CEO may decide that HR must intervene. Such intervention may lead to ..

## Cohesion



### Connecting ideas in a paragraph: Repeating ideas from a previous sentence

#### Example 1

On 5 April the Ministry issued a statement denying the accusations by the former Prime Minister. This angered several former MPs.

On 5 April the Ministry issued a statement denying the accusations by the former Prime Minister. This move angered several former MPs.

Sometimes the word *this* is not clear enough alone and you need to add a noun after it..

(Pakenham, 2001)

### Connecting ideas in a paragraph: Repeating ideas from a previous sentence

#### Example 2

The government has decided to build a new factory on the west side of town. The decision has angered a lot of residents, who fear that the factory will destroy the beauty of their neighbourhood.

Here the writer uses *these* + the *same noun* that was used in the previous sentence

#### Example 3

According to new statistics from the government, unemployment has fallen in the last six months. These figures suggest that the economy is improving.

The noun *figures* is a synonym for the noun 'statistics' in the earlier sentence

(Pakenham, 2001)

### Connecting ideas in a paragraph: Repeating ideas from a previous sentence

#### Example 4

On April 15, 1912, the Titanic, the largest passenger ship in the world at that time, sank in the North Atlantic. A total of 1,522 passengers and crew lost their lives. The disaster shocked the world.

Here the writer is again using *the* + *noun*, but the noun is a general word that describes something in the earlier sentence.

**For things that happen**  
 incident  
 event  
 situation  
 circumstances  
 development

**For things that we do**  
 action  
 move  
 reaction  
 behaviour  
 practice

**For things that we think**  
 idea  
 view  
 attitude

(Pakenham, 2001)

## Showing cause and effect

What is the connection between the first sentence and the second sentence in this paragraph?

### Marker showing cause

The talks between the workers and the company have failed. The company is attributing the failure to the attitudes of the workers. According to the company, the employees refuse to accept that new technology must be introduced into their factories and that this technology will need fewer workers to operate it.

The second sentence contains a possible *cause* for the event in the first sentence

(Pakenham, 2001)

## Showing cause and effect

- More and more women are interested in developing their careers; Or this reason, we can expect an increase in the number of women in medicine, law, and scientific research. Cause Effect
- The cost of residential houses has increased by 40% in the last two years. This dramatic rise in prices has forced many young people into the rental market. Cause Effect
- In the 1980s world oil prices fell. This brought about an improvement in the economies of countries that have to import oil. Cause Effect

(Pakenham, 2001)

## Showing comparison and contrast

Examine the sentence below and answer the following questions:

- What two things is the writer describing?
  - **Problems with diseases in the industrial world**
  - **Problems with diseases in the developing world**
- Does the writer focus on **differences** or on **similarities**?
  - **Similarities**

Both the wealthier industrial world and the developing world are having problems with diseases that are quite easily prevented but that are difficult to cure.

(Pakenham, 2001)

## Structuring a comparison or contrast paragraph

Topic sentence	Wealthy industrial nations and developing nations face different issues in the provision of health-care.
Subject 1	Industrial nations are concerned with providing the latest drugs and technology to treat the small number of ill people in the population. In these nations the focus is on the sophisticated treatment of conditions such as heart disease and cancer.
Detail	Developing nations (in contrast) are faced with the problem of providing for the majority of their population the clean water, the basic drugs and the vaccines that the industrial world takes for granted. In these nations the priority is dealing with diseases that are widespread in the population because of unsanitary living conditions and the lack of basic health care.
Subject 2	
Detail	

Task 3

(Pakenham, 2001)

## Showing contrast

- Smith and Jones (1999) distinguish between deliberate cruelty towards other children and unintentional cruelty (p.46). An awareness of this distinction is useful for a teacher who has to deal with an accusation of bullying in the classroom.
- Wealthy industrial nations are able to provide health care to all those in need of it while many third world countries can provide this care to only twenty or thirty percent of potential patients.
- Wealthy industrial nations are able to provide health care to all those in need of it. In contrast, many third world countries can provide this care to only twenty or thirty percent of potential patients.

Task 2

(Pakenham, 2001)

## Cohesion

- Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists studying black holes in space.
- The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole.
- A black hole is created by the collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble
- So much matter compressed into so little volume changes the fabric of space around it ... (Williams, 1995)

## Rules for starting sentences

- Familiar to unfamiliar
- Easy to hard
- Simple to complex

Start with subject and make it the topic

## Task 2

- Except for those areas covered with ice or scorched by continual heat the earth is covered by vegetation. Plants grow most richly in fertilized plains and river valleys, but they also grow at the edge of perpetual snow in high mountains. Dense vegetation grows in the ocean and around its edges as well as in and around lakes and swamps. Plants grow in the cracks of busy city sidewalks as well as on seemingly barren cliffs. Vegetation will cover the earth long after we have been swallowed up by evolutionary history.
- (Williams, 2005)

## Example rearranged

- When the president assumed office, he had two aims-the recovery of.....He succeeded in the first as testified by the drop in....But he had less success with the second, as indicated by our increased involvement....Nevertheless, the American voter was pleased by vast increases in the military...

• (Williams, 2005)

In his paper on children's thinking, Jones (1985) stressed the importance of language skills in the ability of children to solve problems. He reported that when children improved their language skills, they improved their ability to solve nonverbal problems. Jones thinks that they performed better because they used previously acquired language habits to articulate the problems and activate knowledge learned through language. We might therefore explore whether children could learn to solve problems better if they practiced how to formulate them

(Williams, 2005)

## Coherence



## Coherence

- Sayner, Winsconsin, is the snowmobile capital of the world. The buzzing of snowmobile engines fills the air, and their tanklike tracks crisscross the snow. The snow reminds me of Mum's mashed potato, covered with furrows I would draw with my fork. Her mashed potatoes usually made me sick-that's why I play with them. I like to make a big hole in the middle ..

• (Williams, 2005)

## Coherence

- Subjects of each sentence unrelated
- Sentences don't share common theme
- Paragraph fails to focus on one point
- No sentence that says what the whole paragraph is about (topic sentence)

- Researchers have made strides in the **early and accurate diagnosis** of Alzheimer's but those **diagnoses** have raised a new problem about **informing** those at risk before they show any symptoms of it. Not too long ago when physicians examined an older patient who seemed out of touch with reality, they had to **guess** whether that person had Alzheimer's or was only senile. In the past few years, however, they have been able to use **new and more reliable tests** focusing on genetic clues. But, **in the accuracy of these new tests** lies the risk of another kind of human tragedy: physicians may be able to **predict** Alzheimer's long before its over appearance, but such an **early diagnosis** could psychologically devastate an apparently healthy person.

• (Williams, 2005)

## References

- Pakenham, K.J. (2001). *Making connections: Academic reading techniques*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, J.M, & Feak, C. B, (1994). *Academic writing for graduate students. A course for non-native speakers of English*. The University of Michigan Press
- Williams, J.M (2005). *Style-Ten lessons in clarity and grace*. Chicago: Longman