

## IMPROVING WRITING COHERENCE WITH PARAGRAPH HOOKS

*Polina GORDZEI, lector*

### **Rezumat**

*Acest articol își propune să examineze probleme cu care se confruntă studenții în ceea ce privește coerența textului. Coerența textului este exprimare scrisă corectă, idei coerente care se succed după o anumită logică. Ea reprezintă o componentă esențială în definiția textului, se referă la un ansamblu de trăsături care asigură unitatea semantică a unui șir de propoziții, fraze, astfel încât acestea să formeze o unitate din punctul de vedere al semnificației. Obiectivele acestei lucrări sunt de a prezenta idei și sugestii pentru îmbunătățirea coerenței în exprimarea scrisă la studenți.*

This article sets out to examine the problems faced by ESL learners in relation to coherence in writing. The objectives of this work is to present ideas and suggestions to help students to improve coherence in their writing. It would provide insights to the language teachers on how to help students become more aware of elements of coherence in writing and what can be done to improve coherence in writing.

We must remember, however, that no matter how well a paragraph stands alone it is always just one small part of a larger whole-the essay itself. And in order to do its part in the whole operation, it must connect smoothly with the parts around it.

Transitions between paragraphs fall roughly into three categories:

1. Standard or transitional devices.
2. Paragraph hooks.
3. Combinations of # 1 and #2 [8, p. 31].

The standard devices are simple and obvious; they are specific words and phrases, and using them is hardly more than a matter of selection. The paragraph hooks are more sophisticated.

Transitions can be useful between paragraphs to connect two ideas. Effective transitions highlight the key information from one paragraph to the next and help to create a logic flow between ideas. These transitions do not always have to use transitional words or phrases; however, they can be useful. Using transitions within paragraphs helps a writer stick to each paragraph's main idea. Effectively using transitions between paragraphs helps him connect them so they flow in a logical manner to help readers understand writing's central idea and to emphasize those connections. It should be pointed out that the transitions could be made between paragraphs by using a single transition word, a transitional phrase and complete sentences. While it is common to see transitions at the beginning of paragraphs, it is possible to use them at the end of paragraphs to connect them to the ones that follow.

Although transitional devices are indispensable to the writer, enabling him to make dozens of connections neatly and efficiently, they can't handle the whole transitional load. Even if they could, no writer would depend upon them exclusively, for they can become painfully obvious when they are used over and over again. So if a writer wants his readers to be pleasantly aware that his paragraphs are firmly linked, but he doesn't want them to see the chains too clearly or hear them clank too audibly into place, he might need another kind of transition, something that is both stronger and subtler, i.e. paragraph hooks. Beginning paragraphs with paragraph hooks requires only a little more effort than using the basic transition terms, but it goes a long way toward making a smoother and more coherent essay. To create a paragraph hook, it is necessary to include an important word or idea from the previous paragraph in the first sentence of the next paragraph. The idea of hooks is that the first sentence of the new paragraph will briefly remind the reader (through the use of that keyword) of the topic that has just been covered, while introducing the new idea to be covered in the new paragraph, and showing the connection between the two.

It is worth mentioning that paragraph hooks are simple, concrete techniques that writers can employ to improve the connections between paragraphs and thus improve the overall coherence of a text. Below are two sample paragraphs which we will use to illustrate the different kinds of hooks: „Mark

Twain is established in the minds of most Americans as a kindly humorist, a gentle and delightful "funny man" No doubt his photographs have helped promote this image. Everybody is familiar with the Twain face. He looks like every child's ideal grandfather, a dear old white-thatched gentleman who embodies the very spirit of loving kindness. But Twain wrote some of the most savage satire ever produced in America" [6, p. 22].

The first type is paragraph hook, the simplest kind of hook. The last word of the first paragraph is "hooked" into the first sentence of the second paragraph and used as a point of departure for introducing another idea This repetition hooks the paragraphs together solidly. The hook need not be one word; it can be a phrase. It should not, however, exceed two or three words: e.g.: „This loving kindness begins to look a little doubtful in view of some of his writing. For Twain wrote some of the most savage satire ever produced in America" [6, p. 24]. Generally speaking, the last sentence of a paragraph is the best place to find the hook for a new paragraph, for this sentence is the one freshest in the reader's mind.

The second type of hooks is a deeper hook, i.e. going further back in the last sentence of the first paragraph for the hook:

e.g. „The dear old white-thatched gentleman happens to be the author of some of most savage satire ever produced in America" [6, p. 25].

The third type is multiple hook, e.g. going back past the last sentence of the first paragraph for the hook, but including an additional hook from the last sentence for "insurance": e.g. „To accept such an image is to betray greater familiarity with the spirit of the photograph than that of the writing. For Twain wrote some of the most savage satire ever produced in America" [6, p. 27]. Here both "image" and "photographs" are repeated, thus "double hooking" the paragraphs to make up for the greater distance between their first and second appearance. The greater the distance, the more likely a writer is to need a multiple hook. But no arbitrary rule in this matter is possible. The important thing is to remember the reader. The writer should make certain that the connection is clear to his audience. But on the other hand the connection should not be too clear-that is, it is useless to repeat huge sections or whole sentences from the preceding paragraph. One or two key words will do the job.

All the examples so far have been simple word or phrase hooks. Another variation of the paragraph hook is the idea hook, i.e. the third type. The principle is the same; a writer hook into the preceding paragraph, but instead of repeating an exact word or phrase he refers to the idea just expressed, compressing it into a single phrase: e.g. „Such a view of Twain would probably have been a source of high amusement to the author himself. Twain wrote some of the most savage satire ever produced in America." [6, p. 29] or e.g. „Any resemblance between this popular portrait and the man who reveals himself in his writing is purely imaginary. For Twain wrote some of the most savage satire ever produced in America" [6, p. 29]. In neither of the above examples is an exact word or phrase from the first paragraph repeated. But the hook is clearly there; the referential "such a view" and "this popular portrait" fasten the paragraphs firmly together.

Transitions of this kind require some of the subtlest skills of writing-the ordering of ideas, the use of inference and allusion, the creation of "echo effects," the unobtrusive handling of time and emphasis. All these are skills that derive from an intimate understanding of language-and from experience

The last but not the least point is combinations of standard transitional words and paragraph hooks as a very effective way of linking paragraphs.

e.g. „This loving kindness begins to look a little doubtful, however, in view of Twain's writing, for he wrote some of the most savage satire ever produced in America . . . Yet this dear old white-thatched gentleman wrote some of the most savage satire ever produced in America . . .

But to accept such an image. . .Nevertheless, such of view of Twain would probably..." [6, p. 30].

Whether or not to use a single transition or a combination depends partly upon the writer's sense of what readers requires for clarity and partly upon his own view of his material and his

natural rhythm in writing. If you a writer is certain that he has made himself perfectly clear with a single transition, let it stand. If he is not certain, or if the rhythm of the sentence seems to need an extra beat, it is better to use the combination.

But to take full advantage of possibilities of paragraph hooks, a writer should learn to use the paragraph hook consciously, to direct and control it for his own purposes. Control, remember, is the essence of style, and the handling of transitions is an important part of any writer's style. One kind of link is not necessarily better than any other kind, but variety is better than sameness. But we should remember that any transitional method can become annoyingly obvious to a reader if it is overused. So any writer should vary his practice, never permitting one method of handling transitions to take over the job exclusively.

### **Bibliography**

1. BROWN, G. & YULE, G., Discourse Analysis, Cambridge University, Cambridge, 1983.
2. CAROLL, B.C. & HALL, P.J., Make Your Own Language Tests: A Practical Guide to Writing Language Performance Tests, Pergamon Press, Great Britain, 1985.
3. CARTER, R. AND MCCARTHY, M., Vocabulary and language teaching, Longman, London, 1988.
4. CARTER, R., Vocabulary: Applied linguistic perspectives, Routledg, London, 2007.
5. COADY, J. AND HUCKIN, T., Second language vocabulary acquisition: a rationale for pedagogy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.
6. DONALD, H., Word Works: Learning through writing at Boise State University, Boise State University, The BSU Writing Center, 1995.
7. ELLIS, R., Second language acquisition and language pedagogy, Multilingual Matters, Avon, U.K., 2011.
8. ENKVIST, N.E., Seven Problems in the Study of Coherence & Interpretability, in Connor, U. & Johns, A.M., Coherence in Writing: Research & Pedagogical Perspectives, TESOL, Inc., Virginia, 1990.
9. GRABE,W. & Kaplan, R.B., Theory and practice of writing: an applied linguistic perspective, England: Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, 1996.
10. HALLIDAY, M.A.K., Language as social semantic, Edward Arnold, London, 2012.
- 11.. HALLIDAY, M.A.K. & Ruqaiya Hasan, Cohesion in English, Longman, London, 1976.
12. MCCARTHY, M., Vocabulary, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990.
13. NATTINGER, J. AND DECARRICO, J. Lexical phrases and language teaching, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992.
14. RICHARDS, J.C., PLATT, J. AND PLATT, H. Dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics, Longman, Harlow, 1992.
15. TAYLOR, L., Teaching and learning vocabulary, Prentice Hall, Hertfordshire, 1990.
16. WILLIS AND D. WILLIS eds., Challenge and change in language teaching, Heinemann, Oxford, 2013.