



COHERENCE

Coherence is a smooth movement from one idea to the next in a paragraph. In order to achieve coherence a writer must pay attention to two things.

1. arrangement of the ideas
2. logical connection between ideas

Arrangement of Ideas:

When you build a house, you cannot put the roof on before the walls are built. Similarly, in a paragraph, you cannot skip around from one idea to the next without any sort of arrangement of these ideas; otherwise the reader may become lost or confused.

There are several ways to arrange ideas in a paragraph:

1. **chronological order:** This means that the ideas are presented in the same order that they occurred in time. We have all heard people tell stories when they omit an important event and then go back to put it in later; this can be very confusing. The writer has the advantage that he or she can revise the writing, make any changes before the copy is finished and ready for the reader. So the writer can put in any information which he or she has forgotten.
2. **physical order:** This means that the ideas, particularly in a description, are placed in some kind of order of space, such as left to right, top to bottom, or outside to inside.
3. **order of importance:** The writer can begin with the most important idea and lead to the least important idea. Or the writer can begin with the least important idea and lead to the most important idea. Order of importance can be very helpful when the writer is trying to convince the reader of a particular point of view.
4. **order of climax:** The writer can build suspense leading to a climax. This type of order is similar to the order of importance in that the climax (the most important idea) is put last.

Whatever order the writer chooses, it is important that the sentences in the paragraph be arranged in a logical sequence, so that one idea follows another.



COHERENCE (Continued)

Logical Connection between Ideas:

A train may have all the right cars which are put in the best order for pulling them. However, if the cars are not connected to each other, the train will not be able to move them.

There are words which we use in English called transition words. Transition words provide the connection between the sentences, just as the coupling on a train provides the connection between its cars.

The most obvious transition words list ideas in the order in which they appear. These are “number” words, such as:

- first
- secondly
- thirdly, etc.

These words are very obvious transitions and would be avoided by more experienced writers.

Transition words can express the order of arrangement chosen by the writer. Therefore, there can be transition words which mean each of the following:

- time
- physical order
- order of importance
- similar ideas
- different ideas
- conclusion

The chart on page 24 provides examples of transition words which can express each of these types of arrangement.