

English Corner



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Cohesion

Cohesion is the grammatical and/or lexical relationship between the different elements of a text. This may be the relationship between different sentences or between different parts of a sentence. When we combine sentences and organize paragraphs, we need to help readers see the relationship between sentences. This could be done by supplying **conjunctions**, using **pronouns** (e.g. *he, they, she*, etc), **summary words**, **ellipsis** (i.e. deletion of words to avoid repetition) or **substitution**.

Consider the following passages (adapted from *Time*: April 13 2009). *b* has better “flow” than *a* because of the use of conjunctions showing the relationship between sentences (e.g. condition, time, reason), the use of summary words *the idea*, and the use of *their, they* or *its* to refer to someone or something which has been discussed.

- a. You had told hard-charging professionals in the City of London just a few months ago that they should take a 20% cut to work for one day less per week. They would have likely mocked the idea as a French socialist plot to undermine the British economy. The U.K. arm of accounting firm XXXX recently asked its staff if they would be willing to reduce their workweek – save jobs – business dried up, an overwhelming 85% signed on.
- b. **If** you had told hard-charging professionals in the City of London just a few months ago that **they** should take a 20% cut to work for one day less per week, **they** would have likely mocked **the idea** as a French socialist plot to undermine the British economy. **But** when the U.K. arm of accounting firm XXXX recently asked **its** staff if **they** would be willing to reduce **their** workweek –**and thereby** save jobs – **in the event that** business dried up, an overwhelming 85% signed on.

Read the following examples and find out how cohesion is achieved.

1. A: Is Mable coming to the party?
 B: Yes, **she is**.

Example 1 makes sense to us because we understand the relationship between the question and the answer. The **pronoun she** is used to refer to Mable and **is** is used instead of repeating *is coming to the party* (i.e. **ellipsis**).

2. If you are going to London, I can give you the address of a good hotel **there**.

The link in example 2 is between *London* and *there*. *There* is used to refer to *London* which is used earlier in the text.

3. The knife is too blunt. I must get a sharper **one**.

One is used here to replace *knife*. By using *one*, we don't have to repeat *knife*.

4. Has he gone? I think **so**.

So is used to replace the whole sentence *he has gone*. This is also **substitution**.

5. She is not very good-looking. **But** she's got brains.

The **conjunction** *But* is used to show contrast in the sentences (i.e. not pretty but smart).

6. Old people should be given a high pension during winter months. **This** seems to be the best possible **solution** to the problem.

This is a **demonstrative pronoun** referring to the sentence *old people should be given a high pension during winter months*, and *solution* is a **summary word** summarizing the idea, conveying clearly the meaning of the two sentences.

Quiz:

The following paragraph is taken from part of a business report. What makes the following paragraph cohesive?

*The market size for sports shoes comprises some 185 manufacturers and traders. **Basically**, there are three categories of sports shoes in the market. **These** are real leather, artificial leather and plastic. The largest share of production in 1996 was held by sports shoes manufactured from plastic (50% of production). **This** was followed by artificial leather (40% of production) and real leather (10%). **However, these production statistics** are very changeable because the market is extremely sensitive to fashion trends. For the past few years, **though**, the market has been dominated by synthetic materials, mainly **because they** enable sports shoes to follow fashion trends, they are able to be printed on, and they can be made colourful, bright and fluorescent.*

Source: Bilbow, G (2004). *Business Writing for Hong Kong*. 3rd Edition. Hong Kong: Longman.

References:

Bilbow, G. (2004). *Business Writing for Hong Kong*. 3rd Edition. Hong Kong: Longman.

Peter, G. (2009). 'Can These Jobs Be Saved?'. *Time*. 13 April. p.26.