

Chapter 3 - Cohesion

Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Towards Clarity and Grace*, U. Chicago Press, 1990.

Problem: “To discover how, without sacrificing local clarity, we can shape sentences to fit their context...”

“The challenge of English prose is that, with every sentence we write, we have to strike the best compromise between the principles of local clarity that we discussed in Chapter 2, and the principles of cohesion that fuse sentences into a whole discourse.”

Principles of Cohesion:

1a. “Put at the beginning of a sentence those ideas you have already mentioned, referred to, or implied, or concepts that you can reasonably assume your reader is already familiar with...”

1b. Put at the end of your sentence the newest, the most surprising, the most significant information: information that you want to stress---perhaps the information that you will expand on in your next sentence.

In other words, old first, new last.

2. Among groups of related sentences, keep their topics consistent, if you can. They don’t have to be identical, but they should constitute a string that your readers will take to be focused.

Points:

1. Sometimes passive voice is locally less direct than active voice but allows the two principles of cohesion to be satisfied more easily.

2. At the beginning of a sentence, we commonly put transitions, expressions such as *fortunately*, *in practice*, etc. to help the reader evaluate what follows, indications of time and place, and the topic of a sentence---what we are about to expand on. “Your style will seem cohesive to the degree that you can subordinate the first three of these elements that open a sentence to the fourth, to its topic.”

3. The topic string generally changes when a new section or paragraph begins.

4. Sentences can be rewritten to shift different subjects into the topic position, depending on the desired emphasis.