Micro-Level Coherence

Coherence describes a writer's ability to connect ideas and provide information in a fluid and comprehensible way. At the paragraph level, coherence is achieved through lexical and sentence structure choices. Basically, a reader needs you to:

1. *Use parallel sentence structure.*
2. *Repeat key terms.*
3. *Use transitional words and phrases.*

Why is this paragraph coherent?[1]

Everyone at NASA is excited about Jules Verne. The satellite, Jules Verne, launched into low Earth orbit atop an Ariane 5ES carrier rocket on Friday. It lifted off from ELA-3 at the Guiana Space Centre at 4:03:04. The spacecraft separated from the carrier rocket 1 hour 6 minutes and 41 seconds after lift-off, and navigation systems were subsequently activated. Two days later, on 11 March, the four main engines of the satellite fired for the first time, marking the beginning of several orbital insertion boosts. By all accounts, the operation of the satellite and its propulsion systems were successful.

Parallel sentence structure. Parallel sentence structure is effective because it puts the reader into a rhythm of reading *S-V-O*. The reader comes to expect that the subject from the preceding sentence will be described and elaborated upon in the proceeding sentences. Notice that most of the sentences above have a variation of 'Jules Verne Satellite' as the subject.

Does this paragraph have parallel sentences?

The public typically has mixed reactions to the space program and NASA. It is thought by some that the space program just costs too much. "14 billion dollars is what it costs to launch and maintain a manned spacecraft, which is ridiculous," says Bill Starkson, a conservative taxpayer. When a spacecraft is successful, the public is thought to approve of its nation's accomplishments. This is true, but by a small margin. Only 56% of them approved of the last successful shuttle launch.

It's somewhat clunky and difficult to read as a result. *On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the paragraph above, aligning the subjects where possible.* Look at the top of the next page to see what an ideal paragraph should look like.

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[1] The paragraph above has been modified from Wikipedia.com. The original can be accessed at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jules_Verne_ATV.

What about this one?

> *Not maintaining a car can cost much more in the long run. A study was done by UIC economists that shows that letting car trouble continue doubles the repair cost. According to the American Mechanic Association, not fixing your car can also cost lives. Cars that are not maintained can stall out or seize. Sometimes it happens on the road. In order to keep a car running well and stay safe, it's best to spend the money up front and have the car maintained regularly.*

Repetition of Key Terms

In successful paragraphs, key terms are repeated again and again. This repetition helps the reader zero in on what's important and process the information in the paragraph. Take another look at the paragraph on NASA…

> The public typically has mixed reactions to the *space program and NASA*. Some people just think *space exploration* costs too much. Bill Starkson, a conservative taxpayer says, "14 billion dollars is what it costs to launch and maintain a manned *spacecraft*, which is ridiculous." When a *spacecraft* is successful, the public is thought to approve of its nation's accomplishments. This is true, but by a small margin. Only 56% of the public approved of the last successful *shuttle.*

You'll also notice that the key term isn't always repeated in its original form. Sometimes, a synonym is used to identify the term. In the paragraph above, people, public, and taxpayer are all used interchangeably. In the paragraph below, Jules Verne, satellite, and spacecraft are all used interchangeably. Additionally, the paragraph below[2]

> Everyone at NASA is excited about Jules Verne. The satellite, Jules Verne, launched into low Earth orbit atop an Ariane 5ES carrier rocket on Friday. It lifted off from ELA-3 at the Guiana Space Centre at 4:03:04. The spacecraft separated from the carrier rocket 1 hour 6 minutes and 41 seconds after lift-off, and navigation systems were subsequently activated. Two days later, on 11 March, the four main engines of the satellite fired for the first time, marking the beginning of several orbital insertion boosts. By all accounts, the operation of the satellite and its propulsion systems were successful.

This paragraph additionally uses 'it' to refer back to the Jules Verne Satellite. 'It' is a subjective pronoun. Subjective pronouns are pronouns that can serve as the subject of a sentence in place of another noun. They include: *you, I, he, she, it, they,* and *we.*

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Read the paragraph below and then use parallel sentence structure, synonyms, and pronouns to make it more comprehensible. After you have finished rewriting the paragraph, look on the next page to see an example of what this paragraph could look like.

> *Not maintaining a car can cost much more in the long run. A study was done by UIC economists that shows that letting car trouble continue doubles the repair cost. According to the American Mechanic Association, not fixing your car can also cost lives. Cars that are not maintained can stall out or seize. Sometimes it happens on the road. In order to keep a car running well and stay safe, it's best to spend the money up front and have the car maintained regularly.*

Example Paragraph

> Not maintaining a car can cost much more in the long run. A study by UIC economists shows that letting car trouble continue unchecked will double the repair cost. Additionally, not fixing your vehicle can cost lives. According to the American Mechanic Association, vehicles that are not maintained can stall out or seize. Sometimes, they stop running on an interstate or highway, causing crashes and deaths. In the interest of saving money and staying safe, it's best to spend the money up front and have your car maintained regularly.

In addition, the paragraph above is successful because it uses *transitional words and phrases* to move between ideas. Transitional words and phrases move the reader from one idea to the next and give them an idea of what to expect in the sentence. Transitional words and phrases are underlined above.

Transitional Words and Phrases

To provide more information: *additionally, again, also, besides, furthermore, in addition to, moreover, too*

To compare and contrast: *also, although, but, however, in contrast, nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand*

To summarize: *finally, in closing, in conclusion, in other words, in short, in summary, therefore, to close, to summarize*

To indicate chronology: *after, finally, first/second/third, meanwhile, later, before, afterward, then, next*