CHAPTER 2

Cohesion

CHAPTER PREVIEW

Unlike Chapter 1, where you studied the internal structure of the sentence and the relationship of its parts, the topic of **cohesion** is about the connection of sentences to one another, to the "flow" of a text, to the ways in which a paragraph of separate sentences becomes a unified whole. In our examination of cohesion, we will first look at **reader expectation,** which means, simply, imagining yourself—you, as writer—in your reader's shoes. Then we will examine three important features of cohesive writing:

- The **known–new contract:** a simple but powerful concept that reflects one aspect of reader expectation—that information already known to the reader will usually precede the new information in the sentence.
- **Metadiscourse:** signals, or guideposts, that help the reader interpret the writer's message.
- **Parallelism:** the repetition of structures of the same form for purposes of clarity and emphasis.

The final section in this chapter explains a method of paragraph analysis called **levels of generality,** a way of visualizing the connection of sentences that may illuminate places where revision is called for.

With all of these topics, you are essentially learning to put labels on features of the language that often make the difference between merely adequate prose and really effective prose. When you recognize them and learn to manipulate them, they become writing tools at your disposal.

In every aspect of rhetoric—especially in the matter of connections—the writer must keep the reader and the reader's expectations in mind. So before taking up the separate features of cohesion, we will look at this important concept affecting all the connections: reader expectation.

READER EXPECTATION

Have you ever come across a teacher's "awk" noted in the margin of a written assignment, or have you yourself ever judged a piece of writing as awkward? Perhaps in reading a composition of your own or that of your classmate you have felt that something was amiss—but you couldn't quite put your finger on the something. Such problems can sometimes be traced to thwarted expectations.

Both in reading and in conversation our language is loaded with expectations; we have a sense of direction about language. Although we may not know exactly what's coming next, when we hear it—or read it—we recognize if it's appropriate. It's when the ideas take an unexpected turn that the "awk" response can set in, when a passage fails to fit that expectation, that sense of appropriateness: "I didn't know exactly what was coming next—but I certainly didn't expect *that!*"

In conversation, we can call a halt to the speaker: "Wait! What was that you just said?" But as readers, of course, we don't have that option. Instead, we find ourselves thinking, "Why am I reading this now?" Even though it's only a fleeting thought, it doesn't take many such interruptions—the pause, the second thought, the backtracking—to obstruct the cohesive flow of a piece of writing.

Where do a reader's expectations come from? Obviously, from what has gone before, from the prior text, or, in the case of an opening paragraph, from the title or, possibly, from the author's reputation. Within a paragraph, reader expectation begins with the opening sentence. The writer, of course, has all manner of possibilities for setting up that expectation. The first sentence of this paragraph, because it is a question, sets up the expectation of an answer—or perhaps a second question.

Following is the opening sentence from a paragraph in an article about the "most glamorous sweepstakes in sports"—the Triple Crown of Thoroughbred racing. This paragraph follows the article's opening section discussing the eleven horses that have successfully swept the three races of the Triple Crown since its inception in 1914, the most recent being Affirmed

in 1978. The paragraph is preceded by a heading: "Three races become the ultimate test."

> The sweep is so rare and difficult because each race has unique demands and the series as a whole requires unusual ruggedness.

This opening sentence has no doubt set up an expectation in you about what is coming next. You're probably expecting the next sentence to in some way discuss the difficulties, demands, and/or ruggedness of the Triple Crown sweep.

Now read the complete paragraph:

> The sweep is so rare and difficult because each race has unique demands and the series as a whole requires unusual ruggedness. Racehorses usually do best with about a month between races. In the Triple Crown they must race three times in 36 days, over three different tracks, and at three different distances, all longer than most have ever tried before.
>
> —Steven Crist (*USAir Magazine*)

That second sentence is surely a letdown, however momentary. Not that it's unimportant: We need to understand why the demands are unique. But we were expecting something else here.

Remember that, as with many other facets of language, a reader's expectations are not necessarily conscious thoughts. A thwarted expectation may constitute only a fleeting break in concentration, a momentary blip in the flow. But remember, too, it's that blip that produces the "awk."

Active readers do more than simply process the words and meanings of a particular sentence as they are reading it. They also fit the ideas of the current sentence into what they already know: knowledge garnered both from previous sentences and from their own experience. At the same time, they are developing further expectations.

To become aware of the reader's expectations means to put yourself in the reader's shoes—or head. It requires the ability to read your own ideas objectively, to see and hear your own words as someone else might read them.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Look again at the weasel paragraph at the opening of Chapter 1. Delete the second sentence, the question. Discuss how that deletion has altered reader expectation. In what way does the presence of the question change the expectation set up by the opening sentence? Compose an alternative second sentence in the form of a statement, rather than a question. Compare your version to Dillard's in terms of its effect on a reader's expectation.
2. Revise the second sentence of the Triple Crown paragraph to eliminate that blip of awkwardness. In other words, prepare the reader for the information about the time between races; prepare the reader to expect it.
3. The following sentence begins a short (three-sentence) paragraph in a National Park Service brochure about Fort Raleigh, North Carolina, describing England as a sea power during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603):

   > Successful sea captains weren't the only ones to find Elizabeth's favor.

   What do you expect to read in the next sentence? Does "sea captains weren't the only ones" give you a clue? Here is the rest of the paragraph:

   > Under her rule, England enjoyed a flowering of the arts, especially literature. Names like Shakespeare, Bacon, Spenser, and Sidney commanded as much respect as Raleigh, Grenville, Drake, and Hawkins.

   Did the second sentence fulfill your expectations?

   Revise the paragraph in two ways: (1) by keeping the opening sentence as written and rewriting the others to better fulfill its expectations; (2) by rewriting just the opening sentence to make a smoother fit with the other two.
4. Write down (or read aloud to your group) a partial paragraph from your current essay assignment. Then ask the other members of the group to predict what's coming next.

THE KNOWN–NEW CONTRACT

Seeing the sentence as a series of slots, as you did in Chapter 1, will help you understand the feature of cohesion called the **known–new contract.** It relates to both what the reader knows and what the reader expects.

The first sentence in a paragraph, like the first paragraph of a chapter or an essay, sets up expectations in the reader about what is coming. Certainly one of those expectations is that the following sentences will stick to the

topic. Notice, in the following paragraph, how each succeeding sentence is connected to what has gone before. The paragraph is from a feature called "The October Almanac" in *The Atlantic Monthly,* headlined "Environment" with the date October 16. The sentence numbers have been added to make the discussion easier.

> (1) The results of Reef Check 1997, the first comprehensive survey of the earth's coral reefs, will be released today. (2) The survey, an international cooperative effort among governments, universities, and environmental groups, involved examining more than 100 reef sites. (3) Volunteers collected data to help scientists assess the health of the reefs: for example, they counted members of certain species, such as grouper and sea urchins. (4) Reefs, although they cover less than 0.2 percent of the ocean floor, are home to fully a quarter of marine species. (5) Scientists currently estimate that 10 percent of the world's reefs have been destroyed, primarily by human activities and their consequences, including shipping, pollution, tourism, and global warming, and that another 30 percent could be destroyed in the next 20 years. (6) Today's results should help scientists make more-precise predictions and work toward reducing human damage to reefs.

Clearly, the subject of the second sentence fulfills the reader's expectation with its repetition of the phrase *the survey.* That repetition means that the subject slot constitutes "known information"—with the new information, the reason for the sentence, in the predicate.

In the third sentence the new information appears in the adverbial slot following the basic subject-verb-object sentence pattern. That is, the entire main clause is known information. Even though the actual words, *volunteers collected data,* have not appeared before, we recognize them as known information, a summary, or interpretation, of the information in the preceding sentences.

Not every kind of writing will follow the known–new pattern. For example, a paragraph describing a process might go from one step to the next in successive sentences, with a new topic in each one. A descriptive paragraph, too, is sometimes organized almost as a list of separate details. However, the known–new sequence is the usual pattern in so many kinds of writing that it has come to be called a contract. The writer has an obligation, a contract of sorts, to fulfill expectations in the reader—to keep the reader on familiar ground. The reader has every right to expect each sentence to be connected to what has gone before by means of a known element.

EXERCISE 6

Revise the following passages to improve their cohesion. Think especially about reader expectation and the known–new contract.

1. The Gateway Arch at the edge of the Mississippi River in St. Louis is the world's tallest monument. Eero Saarinen designed the stainless steel structure that commemorates the Westward Movement.
2. Psychologists believe that color conveys emotional messages. Advertisers routinely manipulate consumers using color psychology. The pure white backgrounds and bold primary colors of detergent boxes are thought to influence buyers. Cleanliness and strength are associated with those colors.
3. The relentless heat of California's great Central Valley makes the summer almost unbearable at times. Over 110° is not an unusual temperature reading from June through September. Bakersfield often records the hottest temperature in the valley.
4. Getting chilled or getting your feet wet won't cause a cold. Weather is not the culprit that causes the common cold. Viruses are to blame.
5. Pittsburgh's new baseball stadium is the smallest in the major leagues, except for Boston's Fenway Park. Pittsburgh-based PNC Bank Corporation purchased the right to name the new park. PNC Park is the name they chose. They will pay $1.5 million a year for twenty years for the privilege of naming it. April 9, 2001 was the opening date. There are 38,127 seats in the stadium.
6. Cincinnati Union Terminal opened in 1933. The last train pulled out of the station in 1972. The terminal is now a museum. Its Art Deco style and panoramic mosaics are among its main attractions.
7. The federal witness-protection service began in 1968. The U.S. Marshal Service directs the program. Over four thousand people have been relocated under the program. New identities are created for people in the program. The people are in extreme danger because they have testified against criminals.

The Role of Pronouns

Perhaps our most common known element, equally as strong as the repeated noun phrase, is the pronoun. In Chapter 1, you'll recall, we used **personal pronouns**—*he, she, it, they, we*—to identify the boundaries of noun phrase slots. When we use those pronouns in writing (and we often

do use a pronoun instead of repeating a noun phrase), we call that noun phrase the pronoun's **antecedent.** You can think of the antecedent as the pronoun's back-up system. And because it has that back-up noun phrase, the pronoun is, by definition, known information.

Let's look at a portion of the weasel paragraph we saw in Chapter 1:

> (1) A weasel is wild. (2) Who knows what **he** thinks? (3) **He** sleeps in **his** underground den, **his** tail draped over **his** nose. (4) Sometimes **he** lives in **his** den for two days without leaving. (5) Outside, **he** stalks rabbits, mice, muskrats, and birds, killing more bodies than **he** can eat warm, and often dragging the carcasses home.

The pronoun *he* connects the second sentence to the first—only that one word, but clearly a strong grammatical tie. The third sentence repeats *he.* The fourth and fifth sentences both begin with *he.*

Part of the problem in the second sentence of the Triple Crown paragraph on page 28 is the lack of an expected pronoun. We didn't expect *racehorses.* Obviously the racehorses are part of the picture—the most important part, of course—and, in fact, we even have to admit that *racehorses* qualifies as known information in a paragraph about racing. But in that first sentence the author has set us up for a second sentence about *races.* By not putting expected information in the subject slot, not leading off with *they* or *races,* he has violated the known–new contract.

Possessive Pronouns. **Possessive pronouns,** such as *his* in the third and fourth sentences of the weasel passage, function as **determiners,** or noun signalers. A noun phrase can often be identified on the basis of its opening word, its determiner. The most common determiners are the **articles**—*a, an,* and *the;* possessives—both possessive nouns and possessive pronouns—run a close second. In our five sample sentences at the opening of Chapter 1, four of them have determiners, two of which are possessive nouns: *a* weasel, *Jenny's* sister, *Gino's* father, *the* gymnasium.

In the following passage, the possessive pronoun *its* provides strong cohesive ties:

> Portland, sixty miles from the Pacific Ocean, is by no means immune to the suburbanization that has sapped the vitality from many cities. **Its** suburbs now contain about two thirds of the area's 1.4 million residents and about half of the area's jobs. Yet as the suburbs have grown, the downtown has become more attractive and popular than ever.

> Downtown Portland has distinct edges. **Its** eastern border is the deep, navigable Willamette River, lined for more than a mile by Tom McCall Waterfront Park, a grassy, mostly level expanse suited to events that draw thousands such as the Rose Festival (Portland calls itself the "City of Roses"), a blues festival, and a summer symphony series. **Its** western border is the steep West Hills, which contain Washington Park, home of the International Rose Test Gardens, where more than 400 varieties of roses are cultivated, and Forest Park, whose 4,800 acres of Douglas fir, alder, and maple constitute one of the largest nature preserves and hiking areas in any American city.
>
> —Philip Langdon (*The Atlantic Monthly*)

In the weasel paragraph, *he* constitutes the entire subject; in the Portland paragraph, in all three cases, *its* stands for the possessive noun *Portland's* and acts as a signal for the headwords: *suburbs, eastern border,* and *western border.* But no matter how it functions—whether it fills the whole slot or acts as a determiner—the pronoun represents "known information." It is this known information that helps provide the cohesive tie between sentences. The three *its* sentences here are typical, with the known information in the subject slot, the new information in the predicate.

Problem Pronouns. Writers sometimes introduce weak spots with the vague use of certain pronouns, when the antecedent is not clear to the reader, especially the personal pronoun *it* and the **demonstrative pronouns** *this* and *that* (and their plurals, *these* and *those*). For example, in the following sentence, there is no noun phrase to back up either *that* or *it:*

> My roommate told me she has decided to drop out of school. *That* took me completely by surprise, and I know *it* will shock her parents.

The problem here is not one of communication; we can easily figure out what the sentence means. The point is that we, as readers, shouldn't have to do the figuring. That job belongs to the writer. Often the best way to fix a vague *this* or *that* is to turn it into a determiner and supply the missing headword:

> *That decision of hers* took me completely by surprise.

By turning *that* into a complete noun phrase, we have also provided the vague *it* with a back-up antecedent. It's important to recognize that pronouns without antecedents are in violation of the known–new contract.

EXERCISE 7

Revise the following passages to eliminate the vague pronouns. In some cases the most effective revision will be to turn *this* or *that* into a determiner. Another possibility is to combine the sentences.

1. The contractor for our house is obviously skeptical about solar energy. This doesn't surprise me.
2. The summer heat wave in the Midwest has devastated a large portion of the nation's corn crop there. That probably means higher meat prices for next year.
3. The National Academy of Sciences reports that 90 percent of fungicides, 60 percent of herbicides, and 30 percent of pesticides used in the United States are capable of causing cancer. This will result in an estimated 1.4 million cancer cases; it will slightly increase each American's chance of contracting the disease in their lifetime.
4. I know that I should give up junk food to get in shape for summer, but that is never easy to do.
5. We arrived at the airport two hours before our flight. I was glad to do it, realizing the importance of safety procedures.
6. If I would take time to study my computer manual, it would save me a lot of frustration.
7. Jeremy's father died when he was only six years old. That left the burden of raising him and his sister to his mother. Jeremy remembers that it wasn't easy for her.
8. The movie reviews we read about *Titanic* were mixed, but that didn't seem to keep people from flocking to see it.
9. My friend Abe nearly drowned several years ago when his boat capsized in Lake Erie. I assume that is the reason he became a confirmed landlubber and refuses to go fishing with me.
10. Last year my brother Chuck designed and built his own house—a beautiful rustic log cabin. It really amazed me, because when we were kids he did nothing but break things, especially my favorite toys. In fact, he was always in trouble because of that.

The Role of the Passive Voice

It's possible that everything you've heard about the passive voice up to now has been negative; English teachers often declare it out of bounds. Such edicts come about—those "pass" comments appear in the margins—because writers so often use passives when they shouldn't. And it's true that ineffective passives do stand out. But there's a great deal of misunderstanding about the passive. All good prose includes both active and passive voice.

In Chapter 1 you practiced changing active sentences to passive by making the direct object of the active sentence the subject of the passive. That shift of focus is one of the main strengths of the passive voice, one of its purposes: It allows known information to fill the subject slot. Here, for example, is the beginning of a paragraph from a *Time* article by Michael D. Lemonick about the destruction of the Brazilian rain forests. Note how the subject of the passive second sentence provides a cohesive tie:

> If Americans are truly interested in saving the rain forests, they should move beyond rhetoric and suggest *policies* that are practical—and acceptable—to the understandably wary Brazilians. *Such policies* cannot be presented as take-them-or-leave-them propositions. If the U.S. expects better performance from Brazil, Brazil has a right to make demands in return. In fact, the U.S. and Brazil need to engage in face-to-face negotiations as part of a formal dialogue on the environment between the industrial nations and the developing countries. [Italics added]

In the first sentence, *policies* is new information; in the second it is known.

The following passage, which may look familiar, opens the section in Chapter 1 called "Sentence Patterns." The previous section discussed the two-part sentence, so when you came to this one on page 11, the terms *subject* and *predicate* were known information.

> Unlike the subject, which occupies one slot in the sentence, the predicate can be divided into more than one. In the linking-*be* pattern we've looked at, the predicate has two slots: [A branching diagram inserted here illustrates "A weasel is wild"]. In this pattern the structure following the linking *be* (in this case *is*) is called a **subject complement** because it says something about the subject....

Both the first and the last sentences in this excerpt are passive. In the first one, the new information is the final phrase, *more than one.* In the last one, the new information, the term *subject complement,* is highlighted by boldface type.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. As you know from your reading up to now, grammatical terms are highlighted with boldface type when they are first mentioned, as in the paragraph just cited from Chapter 1. Because the terms constitute new information, you probably don't expect to find them as subjects in their sentences. However, in some cases you'll find that they are subjects. Look through the pages you've already studied to see how the bold terms are placed. Think especially about known and new information. You may want to suggest revisions of those sentences.
2. The following paragraph is the beginning of a short description of Jefferson by Lee A. Jacobus:

> Thomas Jefferson, an exceptionally accomplished and well-educated man, is probably best known for writing the Declaration of Independence, a work composed under the eyes of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and the Continental Congress, which spent two and a half days going over every word. The substance of the document was developed in committee, but Jefferson, because of the grace of his style, was chosen to do the actual writing. The result is one of the most memorable statements in American history.

Explain why the author used the passive voice where he did. Try writing a version of the paragraph using only the active voice. Is it equally effective?

METADISCOURSE

Metadiscourse refers to certain signals that help the reader understand the writer's message. The word *metadiscourse* actually means "discourse about discourse"—in other words, signals that "communicate about communication."[1]

These signals act as guideposts for the reader that clarify the purpose or direction of a particular passage. For example, when a sentence begins, as this one does, with the phrase "For example," you know the sentence will discuss an example of the concept just mentioned. The phrase may not be necessary—many examples go unmarked—but sometimes that help is very important.

[1]The quoted words here are from the article by William Vande Kopple listed under the topic of Metadiscourse in the Bibliography.

Other connectors you're familiar with, such as *first, in the first place, second, next,* and *finally,* clearly add to the ease of reading, the flow of the text. Those that signal contrasting pairs of ideas—*on the one hand/on the other hand*—are also especially helpful.

(Note: It's fairly common, especially in British English, to see an *-ly* added to ordinal numbers when they're used as connectives: *firstly, secondly.* However, your reader will hear a much more natural voice if you use the number without the *-ly.* And the numbers certainly don't need that added ending to make them adverbs, the usual job of *-ly: quick* [adjective]; *quickly* [adverb] We use ordinal numbers as adverbs just as they are: *I saw it first; she came in second.*)

Some of our most common and useful metadiscourse signals are among the class of connectors known as **conjunctive adverbs,** or adverbial conjunctions. They connect structures with a particular emphasis; and they are movable. The following list also includes adverbs and prepositional phrases that function as adverbial connectors:

Addition: moreover, furthermore, likewise, also, in addition

Time: meanwhile, in the meantime, afterwards, previously

Contrast: however, instead, on the contrary, on the other hand, in contrast, rather

Result: therefore, so, consequently, as a result, of course

Concession: nevertheless, yet, still, at any rate, after all, of course

Apposition: namely, for example, for instance, that is, in other words

Summary: thus, then, in conclusion

Reinforcement: further, indeed, in particular, above all, in fact

In some contexts these metadiscourse signals are optional. A phrase like *for example* may not be needed as a sentence opener when it's clear that an example is coming (as this sentence illustrates). But in other contexts the signals provide meaningful help. In the third sentence of the reef passage on page 30, the phrase *for example* is absolutely necessary:

> Volunteers collected data to help scientists assess the health of the reefs: for example, they counted members of certain species, such as grouper and sea urchins.

Without *for example,* the reader would reasonably assume that counting such species as grouper and sea urchins was the one data-collecting activity the volunteers engaged in; with *for example,* it's clear that they collected other data as well. Signals like these contribute to the sense of cohesion, the flow of the paragraph—and sometimes, as we just saw, its accurate interpretation—by keeping the reader informed of the writer's intentions.

PARALLELISM

The topic of discussion here, **parallelism,** is usually thought of as a device for enhancing a writer's style—and, indeed, it is that. It can certainly add polish and flavor to prose that otherwise might be the plain vanilla variety. But it can also provide cohesion.

Parallelism refers to repeated grammatical elements, often combined with repeated words. The quality of being parallel means that the repeated elements have the same structure, such as noun phrases with noun phrases, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases. One of the most famous sentences in President Kennedy's inaugural address includes parallel verb phrases: "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe." And we're all familiar with Lincoln's "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

Parallelism becomes a strong cohesive device when a structure echoes a structure from a previous sentence or paragraph. In the second paragraph of the Portland passage on page 33, the subject "Its eastern border" names one of the "distinct edges" referred to in the opening sentence. The next sentence not only fulfills the reader's expectation with the word *western,* it does so using parallel structure:

> Its eastern border is the deep, navigable Willamette River....
>
> Its western border is the steep West Hills....

In the following passage the author's use of repetition adds intensity and drama to his argument:

> That knowledge has become the key resource means that there is a world economy, and that the world economy, rather than the national economy, is in control. Every country, every industry, and every business will be in an increasingly competitive environment. Every country, every industry, and every business will, in its decisions, have to consider its competitive standing in the world economy and the competitiveness of its knowledge competencies.
>
> —Peter F. Drucker (*The Atlantic Monthly*)

The repeated series in the two subject slots are the most obvious repetitions, but note also in the first sentence two instances of *world economy* contrasted with *national economy;* and in the next two sentences we read *competitive standing, competitive environment,* and *competitiveness.*

The repeated series in this paragraph by Stephen Jay Gould from his book *Ever Since Darwin* illustrates another fairly common feature of parallelism, that of **antithesis,** the introduction of contrasting, or dissimilar, ideas:

> Why imagine that specific genes for aggression, dominance, or spite have any importance when we know that the brain's enormous flexibility permits us to be aggressive or peaceful, dominant or submissive, spiteful or generous? Violence, sexism, and general nastiness are biological since they represent one subset of a possible range of behaviors. But peacefulness, equality, and kindness are just as biological—and we may see their influence increase if we can create social structures that permit them to flourish.
>
> —Stephen Jay Gould (*Ever Since Darwin*)

Antithesis plays a part in the parallelism we see here as well, in the contrast of *easier* and *harder:*

> The wave of software standardization led by Microsoft products like Windows and Word has made computers simpler to use than they once were. It is easier now than it was a decade ago to sit down at any machine, anywhere, and have an idea of how to make it go. But it is harder for a software developer to introduce a genuinely new approach to word processing, data management, or any other established function. And it is much harder for a company even to keep a program on the market if another product, especially one from Microsoft, seems likely to become the standard in the field.
>
> —James Fallows (*The Atlantic Monthly*)

It's fairly common to find the added drama of parallelism used in conclusions, as we see in the following, the final paragraph of an article about two people who follow storms across the Midwest:

> Corso and Dorr will drive on for another two weeks, perpetrating horseplay. They will follow warm fronts across the plains, hunting for the dry line and the triple point. They will listen to brain-killing rock music and consume lethal quantities of deep-fat-fried chicken. They will stand on top of their car to photograph supercells. They will cover about 10,000 miles, their eyes on the clouds, slowly turning the inside of their car into a landfill of empty tortilla chip bags and cola bottles, hoping for a tornado. Where next? I ask. "We'll see how the fronts shape up,"

> Corso says. "But I'm thinking maybe we'll buzz over to New Mexico—we could catch some good lightning!"
>
> —Richard Wolkomir (*Smithsonian*)

Note in the following passage how the point of view changes in the middle of the paragraph where the parallel *it*-clauses begin. Each of them introduces a clause in the second person, one with *you* as the subject.

> A thin broken strand of islands curves out into the Atlantic Ocean and then back again in a sheltering embrace of North Carolina's mainland coast and its offshore sounds. These are the Outer Banks of North Carolina. For thousands of years these barrier islands have survived the onslaught of wind and sea. Today their long stretches of beach, sand dunes, marshes, and woodlands are set aside as Cape Hatteras National Seashore. It can be a lonely place; you may walk along the beach unseen except by shore birds searching for a meal. It can be a place of discovery; you may visit the 1870 Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, one of many monuments to man's encounter with the sea. It can be a wild place; you may be buffeted by an approaching gale or surprised by the honking of large flocks of migrating geese. And it can be an exciting place, where you may explore many opportunities for recreation: surf fishing, sunbathing, swimming, beach combing, canoeing, sailing, surfing, snorkeling. Part land, part sea, Cape Hatteras offers rewards from each.
>
> —National Park Service Brochure

Repetition versus Redundancy

Rather than commending these authors for effective parallelism, you may be tempted to accuse them of unnecessary repetition, a problem that goes by the label **redundancy.** How do we distinguish between them? How do we tell the difference between good repetition and bad?

Parallelism of the kind we see here—parallelism as a stylistic device—invariably calls attention to itself. Did these authors intend to do that, to call attention to these structures? Clearly, the answer is "Yes—and for good reason." In all of these passages, the use of repetition has added a dramatic dimension to the prose.

The repetition in these passages might also tempt you to accuse the authors of wordiness; their sentences certainly don't pass the test of brevity or conciseness, features of writing so often touted in composition textbooks. Clarity, of course, is always a goal. And, yes, sometimes clarity calls for brevity, for a lean version of a sentence. But there are many occasions

that call for a celebration of words. We certainly don't expect the president to be brief in an inaugural address; neither should we expect a writer to be brief in describing Cape Hatteras or in explaining the concept of a world economy or in arguing for the biological basis of kindness.

This chapter began with the discussion of reader expectation. But considerations of the reader go beyond the idea of simply staying on topic and certainly beyond the idea of keeping sentences brief. Reader-based prose also means keeping in mind how the reader will comprehend what you have written, developing the topic sufficiently, recognizing what the reader may know and what the reader may not know. Your job as the writer is to help the reader in every way possible to read your words with understanding. The features of cohesion you have studied in this chapter will help you keep the reader's needs in focus when you write.

The use of repetition as a stylistic device is discussed further in Chapter 11, "Choosing Stylistic Variations."

EXERCISE 8

The following question-and-answer is from the beginning of a two-page magazine ad for Microsoft Windows:

> CAN YOU PLUG ALL TYPES OF PEOPLE INTO ONE TYPE COMPUTER?
>
> No.
>
> After all, people are different. Jobs are different. Companies are different. And people need different types of computers to get their jobs done. Some need powerful PC's and workstations. Some need light and powerful laptops. Some need hand-held devices. Some need simple terminals running off a network. And some need a combination of machines.
>
> Computers *must* be different to meet the different demands people have in their jobs.

Following the model of that answer, with its various repetitions, write answers to one or more of the following questions (or others that you or your instructor may come up with):

> Isn't one good restaurant sufficient for everyone on this campus?
>
> Isn't one well-built car good enough for every driver?
>
> Isn't one standard school building design good enough for every neighborhood school in this state?

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Look carefully at the paragraph about Cape Hatteras. The *it*-clauses are not its only cohesive features. Identify other features that contribute to cohesion.
2. Check an essay of your own or that of a classmate to identify places where parallel repetitions will enhance the cohesiveness of a paragraph. You may find one possibility for revision where you have used pronouns in subject position, as Wolkomir did in the passage about Corso and Dorr—either repeating the subject-verb sequence as he did or by repeating noun phrases instead of substituting pronouns. Another possibility is the repetition of introductory adverbial phrases. Check your concluding paragraph, too, as a potential spot for the added drama of parallelism. But remember that such parallel structures do call attention to themselves, so you'll want to use that kind of repetition only when the passage deserves the added attention.

LEVELS OF GENERALITY

The term ***levels of generality*** refers to a visual method of paragraph analysis that enables the writer to clarify how each sentence in a paragraph relates to its predecessor.[2]

Although introduced for the purpose of developing paragraphs, the technique also illustrates clearly the cohesive features we have examined in this chapter.

First we'll look at a paragraph that has well-defined levels:

> The Zapotec of the 16th century kept two calendars, one secular and the other ritual. The secular calendar of 365 days (*yza*) was divided into 18 "moons" of 20 days and one period of five days. The ritual calendar of 260 days (*pije* or *piye*) was divided into four units of 65 days called "lightnings" (*cocijo*) or "great spirits" (*pitao*). Each 65-day period was further divided into five periods (*cocii*) of 13 days (*chij*).
>
> —Joyce Marcus (*Scientific American*)

[2]The method was introduced by Francis Christensen some forty years ago to describe parts of the sentence; he later applied it to paragraphs. For further information on his work with both sentences and paragraphs, see the Bibliography listing under Levels of Generality.

To outline the levels of generality, we label the topic sentence—usually, but not always, the first sentence—as Level 1. The level of each succeeding sentence will be positioned in relation to its predecessor—as subordinate, coordinate, or superordinate. A more specific second sentence, then, is Level 2. If the third sentence is subordinate to the second, it is Level 3; if coordinate to the second, as in this case, another Level 2. Here is the complete outline:

Level 1: The Zapotec of the 16th century kept two calendars, one secular and the other ritual.

Level 2: The secular calendar of 365 days....

Level 2: The ritual calendar of 260 days... into four units of 65 days....

Level 3: Each 65-day period was further divided....

As the outline shows, sentences 2 and 3 occupy the same level of generality, and sentence 4 is at a more specific level than sentence 3, giving a detail about sentence 3.

You might call this a "textbook" paragraph—at least for this chapter in this textbook. Reader expectation is fulfilled at every level, with known, expected information in the subject slot. The fact that the two Level–2 sentences are parallel in structure adds another cohesive dimension.

Now let's look at another paragraph from the same *Scientific American* article about the Zapotecs:

> In the 16th century Zapotec society was divided into two classes that did not intermarry. The upper stratum consisted of the hereditary rulers (*coqui*) and their families, along with minor nobles (*xoana*). The lower stratum consisted of commoners and slaves. Great emphasis was put on the order of birth of noble children: rulers were frequently recruited from the elder offspring and priests from the younger. Military campaigns were fought by noble officers commanding commoner soldiers. Nobles frequently formed political alliances by marrying into the elite families of other communities; commoners usually married within their village. Royal ancestors were venerated and were thought to have considerable supernatural power over the affairs of their descendants.

Again, the first sentence, Level 1, makes a commitment in its statement about two classes of society:

Level 1: In the 16th century Zapotec society was divided into two classes that did not intermarry.

Level 2: The upper stratum consisted of the hereditary rulers....

Level 2: The lower stratum consisted of commoners and slaves.

Level 3: Great emphasis was put on the order of birth of noble children....

So far the outline looks like the outline of the earlier paragraph, with the two Level–2 sentences fulfilling the commitment of the first sentence. But there's a difference. Although Sentence 4 obviously belongs at Level 3 because it is a specific detail, it is not a detail about sentence three: Rather, it is subordinate to sentence 2, the one about the upper stratum.

There's an easy solution to this problem: The writer can reverse sentences 2 and 3, the two Level–2 sentences, so that the specific details about the upper classes are tied to the Level–2 sentence that begins with "The upper stratum."

In addition to showing where the paragraph might need to be revised, the outline can also suggest where further development is needed. For example, a five-sentence paragraph with only two levels of specificity, such as

1
2
2
2
2

may be crying out for more development, more specifics about the ideas in those Level–2 sentences.

The outline can also indicate where a cohesive signal might help the reader. For example, when the paragraph goes from, say, Level 3 or 4 back to 1 or 2, that more general sentence may need a signal:

1
2
3
4

At this point we are probably expecting either another Level–4 sentence or one at Level 5. We will need some help in getting back to Level 2, if that's

where the next sentence is taking us. In the reef paragraph on page 30, that help is provided by the subject of the final sentence, which repeats that of the opening sentence.

Not every paragraph, of course, conforms to a general-to-specific kind of pattern that can be outlined by levels. However, you will find that thinking about levels of generality in this way—whether or not you actually outline your paragraphs—can be valuable when you're both composing and revising. Considering the relationship of sentences in this way will remind you to consider the needs of your readers.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Apply the levels of generality to the following paragraphs:

> The jaguar is the perfect conservation symbol. A mythic animal with great imaginative allure, it has been a major presence in Latin American life. The Aztecs and the Maya revered it. As if to wrap themselves in the jaguar's power and authority, royalty and warriors in these cultures wore jaguar skins and framed their human faces with the intimidating jaws of gaping jaguar mouths. In the temples of Teotihuacan not far from Mexico City, the jaguar has its own palace, with murals portraying the creature in feathered headdress.
>
> —Charles Bergman (*Smithsonian*)

> But if home schooling is flawed, and our public schools are weathered, some believe there's a way to improve both by reinvesting home schoolers in their communities and making public schools more nimble. A few school districts are showing the way. In some states, including California and Texas, school districts now allow home-schooled kids to sign up for such offerings as a physics class or the football team. A growing number of districts are opening resource centers where home schoolers come for class once or twice a week. In Orange County, Calif., two school districts have combined two reform ideas by opening charter schools that offer home-schooling programs.
>
> —John Cloud and Jodie Morse (*Time*)

2. Outline the reef paragraph on page 30 according to its levels of generality. You'll notice that the subject of the final sentence echoes the subject of the Level-1 opening sentence. Can you make a case for calling the final sentence a Level–1 sentence—or is Level 2 more accurate?

3. As you read in the footnote at the opening of this section, this method of determining levels of generality was first applied to sentences. Look at the last sentence in the passage about Portland on page 33. Outline it according to levels of generality.
4. Select one or several paragraphs of an essay you are now working on. Outline them according to the levels of generality to identify places where revision or further development may be called for.

KEY TERMS

Antecedent
Antithesis
Articles
Cohesion
Conjunctive adverb
Demonstrative pronoun
Determiner
Known–new contract
Levels of generality
Metadiscourse
Parallelism
Passive voice
Personal pronouns
Possessive pronouns
Pronouns
Reader expectation
Redundancy
Repetition
Vague pronouns

RHETORICAL REMINDERS

Have I anticipated my reader's expectations?

Is the known information in the beginning of the sentence, where it can provide a cohesive tie to the previous sentence, with the new information in end-focus position?

Have I used metadiscourse effectively to signal the reader where necessary?

Have I taken advantage of parallelism as a cohesive device?

Do my sentences follow logically in terms of their levels of generality? Have I used specific details to support my generalizations?

PUNCTUATION REMINDER

Have I set off conjunctive adverbs and other metadiscourse units with commas where necessary?

CHAPTER 3

Sentence Rhythm

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter we will look at a feature of language you might not have thought about before: its rhythm. Yes, our language has a rhythm, just as music does—a regular beat. When you learn to listen to that beat and think about it when you write, you will be in control of an important writing tool.

We will begin by examining the valleys and peaks of **intonation** and the connection of those patterns with **end focus,** which is tied up with the known–new contract you learned about in Chapter 2. You will learn how to control sentence rhythm, using **cleft sentences,** the ***there*-transformation, power words,** and punctuation.

Even though these terms may be new to your vocabulary, the concepts they name are part of your everyday language, in both speech and writing. This chapter is really about consciousness raising; it's about awareness. That awareness will help you control the message that your reader gets.

INTONATION: THE PEAKS AND VALLEYS

One of the most important aspects of your expertise with sentences is your sense of rhythm. For example, if you read the opening sentence in this paragraph out loud, you'll hear yourself saying "one of the most" in almost a monotone; you probably don't hear a stressed syllable, a beat, until you get to *important:*

one of the most imPORTant

Reference Guide

(Page numbers are shown in parentheses)

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

PUNCTUATION

COHESION

DICTION

REVISION

(Continued on inside back cover)

Rhetorical Grammar

Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects

FOURTH EDITION

Martha Kolln

The Pennsylvania State University

New York San Francisco Boston
London Toronto Sydney Tokyo Singapore Madrid
Mexico City Munich Paris Cape Town Hong Kong Montreal

For Jeannine Johanna and Eleanor Robin,
two remarkable language users.

Senior Vice President and Publisher: Joseph Opiela
Executive Vice President and Publisher: Eben W. Ludlow
Marketing Manager: Carlise Paulson
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Project Coordination, Text Design, and Electronic Page Makeup: Electronic Publishing Services Inc., NYC
Cover Designer/Manager: Nancy Danahy
Manufacturing Buyer: Al Dorsey
Printer and Binder: Courier/Stoughton
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color Corp.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kolln, Martha.
Rhetorical grammar : grammatical choices, rhetorical effects /Martha Kolln.—4th ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-321-10338-6
1. English language—Rhetoric. 2. English language—Grammar. I. Title.

PE1408 .K696 2002
808'.042—dc21

2002019030

Please visit our website at http://www.ablongman.com

ISBN 0–321–10338–6

5 6 7 8 9 10—CRS—05 04

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