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Grammar & Style: Cohesion & Coherence
(Adapted from Joseph Williams' and Joseph Bizup's
Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace, 5th ed,
"Lesson 4: Cohesion and Coherence")

Williams' Principles of Cohesion (how each subsequent sentence relates to the previous sentence):

- #1: Begin sentences with information familiar to your readers
- #2: End sentences with information that readers cannot anticipate

These principles are often called the "old to new" approach; begin with old information and add something new.

Williams' Principles of Coherence (how all of the sentences in a paragraph are related):

- #1: The subjects of the sentences within a paragraph should be related.
- #2: The sentences should share a common idea or thread.
- #3: The paragraph has a sentence that indicates the purpose of the whole paragraph.

Coherence can be developed by using "key terms" to help focus your argument within a paragraph. Make sure that the subjects and topics of your sentences are all related to a common, specifically defined idea as suggested by a single phrase and its judiciously used synonyms. *This includes the language used by sources in quotations.*

Caveat: Avoid phrases that are "throat clearing" and that create "fake cohesion"

Many students begin sentences with transition words and conjunctions because they've been told to "use transitions." However, you should use such words sparingly; use them only when they are absolutely necessary to show the character of the specific logical connection between sentences. For example, the previous sentence uses "However" in order to indicate that the advice in the sentence contradicts the advice in the previous sentence. The use of "moreover" in this sentence, moreover, isn't necessary, as it doesn't enhance our understanding of the relationship between the sentences.

Suggested revision strategy: Read through your draft and circle where any of the following words appear. If more than 1-2 of these words appear on each page, revise the sentences to eliminate the words. Keep in mind that using these words is OK—it's the *overuse* of these words that is a problem

Words to look out for:

thus	moreover
therefore	hence
however	indeed
also	consequently
in addition	

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Practice: Choose one paragraph from your draft and revise it using principles of cohesion and coherence.

- 1) First, look for coherence: Is there a clear claim at the beginning of the paragraph? Are all of the sentences clearly and explicitly related to that claim? Are key terms repeated to help create these connections?
- 2) Next, look at cohesion: Do the sentences immediately build from one sentence to the next? Is old information offered in the first part of the sentence, and new information offered in the next part of the sentence?