

Strategies for High Impact Writing

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Overview:

- Textual cohesion and coherence
- Theme and rheme
- Nominalisation
- General comments on academic style

1. Textual Cohesion: Old-to-New

1.1. Begin sentences with information familiar to your readers:

– *information from a preceding sentence or two*

OR

– *information associated with the general knowledge of its subject*

1.2. End sentence with information readers cannot anticipate.

– *readers prefer to read what is easy before they read what is hard*

STARTING WITH INFORMATION FAMILIAR FROM A PRECEDING SENTENCE:

*Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists studying **black holes in space**. A **black hole** is created by the collapse of a dead star into a **point perhaps no larger than a marble**. So much **matter compressed into so little volume** changes the fabric of space around it in puzzling ways.*

(Williams 2002)

STARTING WITH INFORMATION FAMILIAR FROM GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT:

*So much matter compressed into so little volume changes the fabric of space around it in puzzling ways. **Astronomers have recently reported**, for example, that...*

(Williams 2002)

Textual Coherence: Sentence Topics

- Readers expect the topic of the sentence to be its grammatical subject
 - ✓ not always the case
- When topics and subjects coincide, the text is perceived as clear and direct
- The topics of a textual passage should, ideally, constitute a related set of concepts

Excerpt A

The particular ideas toward the beginning of sentences define what a passage is ‘about’ for a reader. **Moving through a paragraph from a cumulatively coherent point of view** is made possible by a sequence of topics that seem to constitute a limited set of related ideas. **A seeming absence of context for each sentence** is one consequence of making random shifts in topics. **Feelings of dislocation, disorientation, and lack of focus in a passage** occur when that happens.

(Williams 2002)

Excerpt B

Readers look for the topics of sentences to tell them what a whole passage is ‘about’. If **they** feel that its sequence of topics focuses on a limited set of related topics, then **they** will feel they are moving through that passage from a cumulatively coherent point of view. But if **topics** seem to shift randomly, then **readers** have to begin each sentence from no coherent point of view, and when that happens, **readers** feel dislocated, disoriented and the passage seems out of focus.

2. Building a critical stance through your writing: Theme and Rheme

- The topic of the sentence/clause is also called its 'theme'
- As a rule of thumb, it comprises all words which occur at the beginning of the sentence/clause, up to its verb
E.g. An in-depth understanding of the writing process results in the production of high-quality texts.
- The remaining words (including the verb) are known as 'rheme'

Theme and Rheme

- We can choose to foreground different parts as the theme of the sentence/clause:

An in-depth understanding of the writing process results in the production of high-quality texts.

OR

The production of high-quality texts is the result of an in-depth understanding of the writing process.

Task:

- Compare the different versions of the of the Literature review excerpts provided by the facilitator
- What differences do you notice in each version?
- What is the effect of the changes made?

Task: Trajectory of Ideas and Stance-Taking in Literature Reviews

- Identify the main ideas/arguments brought forward in the excerpts provided (see ***TRAJECTORY OF IDEAS AND STANCE-TAKING IN LITERATURE REVIEWS HANDOUT***)
- What is the purpose of citing the names and work of the author(s)?
- What is the writers' stance towards each of the authors?
- How do you know?

3. Nominalisation

- The process by which verbs/adjectives are changed to nouns
- Typical of writing rather than speaking

Spoken

If you revise each chapter carefully before you submit the thesis, then you're likely to get good results.

Written

Careful revision of each chapter prior to thesis submission will increase the likelihood of a good result.

(Kamler and Thomson 2006:105)

Nominalisation (continued)

- Allows more information to be packed into the nominal groups (the noun and its accompanying words) on either side of the verb.

Careful revision of each chapter prior to thesis submission will increase the likelihood of a successful examination.

... will increase the likelihood of a crafted text and a successful examination.

Nominalisation (continued)

- is used to condense meaning
- creates abstracts ideas and concepts rather than focus on people and action
- these concepts are easily portable across the text and help to hold it together
- they make it easier to convey the author's stance
 - ✓ by helping him/her create Big Issues, matters of concern
 - ✓ by relating his/her individual contribution to the larger issues in the field

Task:

- Compare Version A and Version B of the text on the handout
- What differences do you notice in each version?
- What is the effect of the changes made?

Nominalisation: A word of warning...

• [http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/23/zombie-nouns/? r=0](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/23/zombie-nouns/?r=0)

• <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/beware-of-nominalizations-aka-zombie-nouns-helen-sword>

4. General comments on academic style.

1. Read the following article:

Watts, G. (2000) 'How to Write a Paper'. *Times Higher Education* [online] 22 September.
available from

[http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/
story.asp?storyCode=166890§ioncode=26](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=166890§ioncode=26)

[accessed 14 October 2009]

2. Do you agree or disagree with the writer's stance? Why?

Time for questions...

List of References

- Bartram, B., and Baily, C. (2009) 'Different students, same difference?: A comparison of UK and international students' understandings of 'effective teaching'. *Active Learning in Higher Education* 10 (2), 172-184
- Kamler, B., and Thomson, P. (2006) *Helping Doctoral Students Write: Pedagogies for Supervision*. Oxon: Routledge
- Kennedy, E. (n.d.) Qualitative measures of food insecurity and hunger [online] available from <<http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4249e/y4249e0c.htm>> [9 March 2016]
- Watts, G. (2000) 'How to Write a Paper'. *Times Higher Education* [online] 22 September. available from <<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/166890.article>> [14 October 2009]
- Williams, J. M. (2002) *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. Harlow: Pearson Longman