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Revising for Coherence

Just DUC It

As you begin revising your paragraphs done during freewriting, keep in mind the main three goals summarized by our mnemonic device: **DUC.**

D Stands for **development**, or having enough stuff. You can choose from the various lists of kinds of development material: "The Big Five"—examples, facts, statistics, personal experience/anecdote, and expert testimony. There are also the 10 basic patterns of development: description, definition, narration, exemplification, cause/effect, comparison/contrast, classification, division, logical argument, process. The best development technique is always the one that best serves your paragraph and can be a combination of the above techniques.

U Stands for **unity**, of having the right stuff. One of the things that should happen in your freewriting is that you let loose, take off the reigns and give yourself a chance to follow thoughts wherever they may lead you. Because your goal in freewriting is to listen to the tiny voice in your head and write down *everything* it says, at the end of the freewriting you may likely find that some stuff will not relate directly enough to the main point. So you'll have to take it out and save it for later. Taking out stuff that doesn't belong and keeping stuff that does is how you achieve paragraph unity.

C Stands for **coherence**, or making thoughts stick together. Whenever you admire a piece of writing because it has good "flow," you are most likely appreciating its coherence, when the sentences seem to flow naturally and seamlessly together. Coherence is tough because of the difference between thinking and writing, talking and writing. When we think, the connections between our thoughts are often subconscious, hidden from view. When talking, we supply connections between thoughts with gestures, tone of voice, facial expressions. Besides, if someone doesn't get it, they can ask us to explain.

When writing, you cannot rely on your subconscious or your body to fill in the gaps. You have to use these four (4) techniques:

Repetition

It's impossible to write on a topic coherently without repeating the key terms related to it. Writers in training learn to take advantage of this—to use strategic repetition (not too much, not too little) to knit together their discussion. Usually the difference between good repetition and bad is pretty obvious:

The problem with **symphonic music** is that it is not easily understood by the untrained, who enjoy the mood it produces. **Symphonic music** is enormously complex and knowledge of its intricacies is required to appreciate it.

Repetition can also occur using various forms of the same word:

The problem with **symphonic music** is that it is not easily understood by the untrained, who enjoy the mood it produces. **Symphonies** are enormously complex and knowledge of their intricacies is required to appreciate them.

Ineffective repetition is usually pretty easy to spot:

The problem with **symphonic music** is that it is not easily understood by the untrained, who enjoy the mood that **symphonic music** produces. However, **Symphonies** are complex and knowledge of the intricate **symphonic forms** is required to appreciate most **symphonies.**

Synonyms

One way to avoid ineffective repetition is to use synonyms, words that have essentially the same meaning as another. Example:

Some say that **parenting** comes naturally, but I am not one of them. **Child rearing** is like anything else we do: We can function unthinkingly from past habit and myth, or we can gain knowledge and develop expertise. **Bringing up baby** to be a loving, responsible, and moral adult isn't magic; it's the hardest job you'll ever have.

Notice that synonyms can be single words or phrases that contain the same meaning.

Pronouns

It's also impossible to write coherently about something without using pronouns—words that refer back to something already said. However, these words can also point forward in phrases like "these words," especially when they are demonstrative pronouns.

Pronouns are the largest group of function words that we have in our language for a very good reason: they allow us to use repetition effectively without employing the same word or constantly thinking up synonyms. You are probably familiar with most of pronoun groups:

Personal Pronouns	Relative Pronouns	Demonstrative Pronouns	Indefinite Pronouns
I, me, my, mine	Who, whom	This, that	One, any, none
You, yours	That, which	These, those	Most, some, all
He, him, his	Whose	Them	Anyone, no one
She, her, hers	Whoever	Etc.	Etc.
Etc.	Whomever		

The key to good pronoun usage is to ensure that the pronoun's referent (the thing it refers back to) is immediately clear to the reader and there is little chance for confusion. Example of effective pronoun use:

When cell phones are not used responsibly, they're more than nuisances—they're deadly. The classic bumper sticker "Hang up and drive!" expresses the frustration many drivers feel as they watch the car ahead bob and weave, slow and speed, just because someone forgot to put someone else on speed dial. Enough people have been killed just so the driver could look like he/she was doing a deal with The Donald when the only words spoken into the cell of death was, "Honey, I'm stuck on Abercorn and will be five minutes late."

Transitions

These are words and phrases that build "though bridges." Transitions come in several varieties. There are the lists of single-words transitions like you see below, but there are also transition phrases and sentences constructed from information you're using that are often the most effective bridges.

Transition Sentence

Let's say you've just finished illustrating how over-developed our coast lines have become. Now you will discuss some of the negative effects of this over-development. To create a thought bridge, you write:

The disastrous effects of coastal development can first be seen on near shore wildlife that can no longer survive the changes in their environment. These animals include …..

"The disastrous effects of coastal development" is a thought bridge that takes one element from what came before and adds it to what is about to come in order to create a bridge between the two.

Transition Words and Phrases

It's nice when someone has already done the work for us, which is the case with pre-fab transitional words and phrases. But be careful: these standard, one-size-fits-all tools may not be as a good a fit as something you could create yourself. Here's one of the best and longest lists of them, from Germany of all places: http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~jsuther/linkings.html

Addition and concurrence	Contrast	Cause-effect and reason-result	Concession, Assertion contrary to expectation
and	*than*	*because*	*although*
not only...but also	*whereas*	*since*	*even though*
besides	*not as/so ...as*	*as*	*though*
moreover	*but*	*for*	*yet*
also	*while (informal)*	*so*	*but*
furthermore	*however*	*therefore*	*still*
in addition	*by/in contrast*	*consequently accordingly*	*nevertheless*
	on the contrary	*hence*	*nonetheless*
Alternative idea	*on the other hand*	*thus*	*however that may be*
or		*for this reason*	*in spite of the fact that*
either...or	**Negation**	*as a result*	*however much*
otherwise	*nor*	*consequently*	
instead	*neither...nor*		
		Purpose	**Sequence (time)**
Similarity	**Condition**	*so that*	*first, second, etc.*
like (prep.)	*if*	*in order that*	*in conclusion*
as...as	*if...then*		*in the meantime*
likewise	*unless*	**Closer Focus, supporting details and examples**	*then*
similarly	*whether*	*in fact*	*thereafter*
in like manner		*for example*	*subsequently*
	Transitions	*A good example of this is...*	
Concluding, summarizing	*Now that we have..., let us take a closer look at...*	*To illustrate,...*	**Paraphrasing**
In short,...	*Let us turn our attention to...*	*Let us take a closer look*	*In other words,…*
In conclusion,...			*…, or…,*
In other words,...			

| To sum up,...
To recapitulate,... | **Backward pointers**
This / These
The above-mentioned... | *at...* | **Postponing**
I will deal with / discuss /
address / examine this in
more detail below, but first |