

2017 TasTESOL Conference Workshop

Paragraph analysis (& cohesion in writing)

Language operates at different levels: **words, sentences, text or discourse** (e.g. paragraphs, essays, letters, newspaper articles, signs, etc).

What distinguishes a group of sentences from a text?

- a completeness – a beginning and end/resolution
- cohesion and coherence between the parts i.e. they 'fit together' and 'make sense'

This depends a lot on the context. Something 'cohesive' may become meaningless or incoherent if it is taken out of context; and vice versa – something that's nonsense or 'random' on the surface may make sense once the context is clear.

Text COHESION

Why are the following texts strange? Why *AREN'T* they cohesive?

- a) It was another fabulous Sydney day but we went for a walk in the Botanical Gardens. The paths were mostly fenced off for a big outdoor concert that night so we could stroll around anywhere we wanted to look at the flowers. Because the weather suddenly turned cold, it was a really great afternoon.
-

- b) John bought a new car in 2009. Last year John sold that car and John bought a new car. John sold that car only a month later because John got a new job which provided John with a company car.
-

- c) Dear Sir/Madam,
I am emailing about a problem with my Netbank list of transactions. A cash withdrawal of \$200 is shown for 10th March from Coles supermarket in Toowong, Brisbane. However, I was in Hobart then as you can see from the next withdrawal a few minutes later from Coles in New Town. Be an angel and have a squiz at your records. Could you get back to me asap?
Ta,
-

d) We finally got on the plane and it was full – maybe 80 people – all escaping the winter for a holiday in Surfers. We had just settled back into our seats when the driver announced that there was going to be a slight delay. “There’s a small problem with one of the motors”, he said over the stereo. However, the waiters came around with magazines and gave out some games to the kids and these helped kill time.

e) regarding the article must things pass frankly I’m fed up with baby boomer bashing even if it’s done by one of us every time someone wants to make a point about how badly things are going in the world they refer to the boomers who were active in the 1960s but we’re bigger than that by labelling us critics make our generation ...
(from Letters *The Big Issue* 4.2.02)

f) The pros and cons of shared accommodation (adapted from *Headway Intermediate Student’s Book* p.85)
Sharing a flat certainly has some advantages. It is usually cheaper. It is nice to have some company at home rather than being all on your own. However, sharing a flat has some distinct disadvantages. When you are younger and you are living apart from your parents for the first time, it can be very enjoyable to live with people your own age. Also, the household chores are shared and that is very important. The main problem is that the flat is not your own, so you cannot do what you want in it. It’s good to live with people whose interests and life-style you share. What happens if you want to go to bed but your flat-mate wants to play music? I would say that as you get older, it is probably better to live on your own. To a certain extent, you have to be unselfish. What is more, there can be little privacy.

g) When travelling to a new time zone, our circadian rhythms are slow to adjust and remain on their original biological schedule for several days. This results in your body telling you it is time to sleep in the middle of the day, or it makes one want to stay awake late at night. This experience is known as ‘jet lag’.

There are a few ways of reducing the effects of jet lag. You can select a flight so you arrive tired in the evening; also, adjusting to the new time zone a few days before flying, and changing your watch to the new time zone as soon as you’re on the plane are good ideas; and the final tip – avoid cups of coffee just before you arrive (and want to sleep).
Adapted (badly!) from the National Sleep Foundation website 2017

ANSWER KEY 2017 TasTESOL Conference Workshop

Paragraph analysis (& cohesion in writing)

Language operates at different levels: **words, sentences, text or discourse** (e.g. paragraphs, essays, letters, newspaper articles, signs, etc).

What distinguishes a group of sentences from a text?

- a completeness – a beginning and end/resolution
- cohesion and coherence between the parts i.e. they 'fit together' and 'make sense'

This depends a lot on the context. Something 'cohesive' may become meaningless or incoherent if it is taken out of context; and vice versa – something that's nonsense or 'random' on the surface may make sense once the context is clear.

Text COHESION

Why are the following texts strange? Why *AREN'T* they cohesive?

- a) It was another fabulous Sydney day but we went for a walk in the Botanical Gardens. The paths were mostly fenced off for a big outdoor concert that night so we could stroll around anywhere we wanted to look at the flowers. Because the weather suddenly turned cold, it was a really great afternoon.

Students need practice with '**discourse markers**' / '**linkers**' (*but, so because*); here, they don't fit the ideas in the text. When reading in class, get students to underline linkers, give synonyms, etc.

- b) John bought a new car in 2009. Last year John sold that car and John bought a new car. John sold that car only a month later because John got a new job which provided John with a company car.

Students need practice with anaphoric & cataphoric **referencing** i.e. referring forwards & back a within a paragraph or story or essay, especially (in this text) pronouns (*he, it, etc*).

- c) Dear Sir/Madam,
I am emailing about a problem with my Netbank list of transactions. A cash withdrawal of \$200 is shown for 10th March from Coles supermarket in Toowong, Brisbane. However, I was in Hobart then as you can see from the next withdrawal a few minutes later from Coles in New Town. Be an angel and have a squiz at your records. Could you get back to me asap?
Ta,

Students need practice at being consistent with **formality** of language e.g. when reading in class get them to identify how in/formal a text is, and what words/phrases show that.

- d) We finally got on the plane and it was full – maybe 80 people – all escaping the winter for a holiday in Surfers. We had just settled back into our seats when the driver announced that there was going to be a slight delay. “There’s a small problem with one of the motors”, he said over the stereo. However, the waiters came around with magazines and gave out some games to the kids and these helped kill time.

Students need to learn **collocations** i.e. which words do/don't fit with a particular context (- here, *driver* → *pilot*, *motor* → *engine*, *stereo* → *intercom*, *waiters* → *attendants*). When reading in class, get students to identify vocab that relates to that particular context or topic.

- e) regarding the article must things pass frankly I'm fed up with baby boomer bashing even if it's done by one of us every time someone wants to make a point about how badly things are going in the world they refer to the boomers who were active in the 1960s but we're bigger than that by labelling us critics make our generation ...
(from Letters *The Big Issue* 4.2.02)

Students need to practice **punctuation**; show them examples where punctuation changes meaning.

- f) The pros and cons of shared accommodation (adapted from *Headway Intermediate Student's Book* p.85)
Sharing a flat certainly has some advantages. It is usually cheaper. It is nice to have some company at home rather than being all on your own. However, sharing a flat has some distinct disadvantages. When you are younger and you are living apart from your parents for the first time, it can be very enjoyable to live with people your own age. Also, the household chores are shared and that is very important. The main problem is that the flat is not your own, so you cannot do what you want in it. It's good to live with people whose interests and life-style you share. What happens if you want to go to bed but your flat-mate wants to play music? I would say that as you get older, it is probably better to live on your own. To a certain extent, you have to be unselfish. What is more, there can be little privacy.

Students need to practice organising ideas into **paragraphs**.

- g) When travelling to a new time zone, our circadian rhythms are slow to adjust and remain on their original biological schedule for several days. This results in your body telling you it is time to sleep in the middle of the day, or it makes one want to stay awake late at night. This experience is known as 'jet lag'.

There are a few ways of reducing the effects of jet lag. You can select a flight so you arrive tired in the evening; also, adjusting to the new time zone a few days before flying, and changing your watch to the new time zone as soon as you're on the plane are good ideas; and the final tip – avoid cups of coffee just before you arrive (and want to sleep).
Adapted (badly!) from the National Sleep Foundation website 2017

Students need to practice '**parallelism**' i.e. being consistent with grammatical structures within paragraphs e.g. here, after ... *your body telling you ... makes ~~one~~ you want to stay awake*. And esp with 'lists' e.g. after *You can select..., say ... also you can adjust, ... can change, ... should avoid ...* rather than mixing imperatives, gerunds, etc.