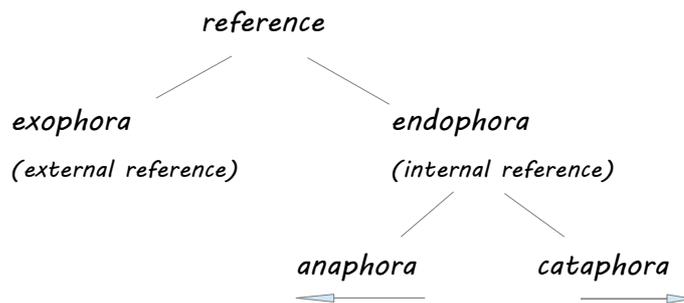


## COHESIVE DEVICES

When we write an essay, there are several points we want to make and an overall idea we hope to get across to the reader. We use grammar and lexical (vocabulary) tools to make all the points come together and form one understandable whole. We want the whole to fit logically together to make a point. If we succeed, and the reader understands our overall meaning because our essay 'sticks together' properly, it has **coherence**. The parts don't go in just any order (as you saw when you were ordering the sentences of your paragraph); there are certain ways sentences and paragraphs connect with each other to fit properly. The tools we use to link all the parts of an essay into one meaningful whole create **cohesion** – like glue that sticks together many parts of a picture. There are six important tools we use to create cohesion.

**1. Reference** – there are fancier names for this (**anaphor**, **cataphor**, etc.) but really they all just mean referring to something mentioned elsewhere in your essay. We do this all the time when we speak. *“The dentist has an opening tomorrow at 2:00. He will see you then.”* Who is “*he*”? What is “*then*”? If someone told you only the second sentence, it wouldn't make much sense (and, if your tooth hurt a lot, you might get a bit angry), but together with the first sentence, the meaning of the second is quite clear. Just like your mother is clear when she says, *“The wastebasket is full. Please empty it.”* If you ask her, *“Wait, what do you mean, 'it'?”* she won't think you are being funny, and she won't believe that you don't understand. We use pronouns and other special words to refer back to things – people, places, times, etc. – with such frequency that these patterns are quite familiar. So, look for this linkage of words to earlier mentions of things when you read, and you will start to understand how cohesion works.

Reference is used to create cohesion in several different ways. If your father walks out and sees you standing by the car, which is wrecked, and says *“Did you do **that**?”* he's making a reference to something outside the text (here, a situation) that is obvious to both of you, the speakers. He didn't have to say first, *“Oh, look, the car's been wrecked.”* You probably won't want to tell him so, but he's just provided an example of **exophora**. On the other hand, if you make a statement to the police about the wrecked car, and you say that you came downstairs in the morning, saw that the car was wrecked, but didn't see anyone around, and the policeman asks, *“So, what time did you come down and notice **this**?”* he's using **endophora**, because “*this*” refers to the fact that the car has been wrecked, something you explicitly said, and it's an **anaphoric**, because the reference is to something earlier, although, again, you probably won't want to point out these interesting grammatical facts to the policeman just then. The diagram that follows shows how these ideas fit together.



(adapted from Schmolz, 2015)

Definite pronouns and determiners are usually what we use to refer back to people, objects, and situations that we've mentioned earlier in a text, e.g., *she, they, it, those, that*.

*No one seemed to want the last piece of cake. **It** sat on the plate for days getting stale. Finally, late last night, when John came home tired and hungry, **he** ate **it**, only to have Susan scream at **him** this morning for having finished **it**.*

Anaphoric reference is really a form of substitution, replacing one word or phrase with another, usually shorter, way of saying the same thing. To find these anaphoric references in a text, look especially for pronouns, demonstratives, and adverbials like the following:<sup>1</sup>

personal pronouns (subjective or objective forms): I, you, we, he, she, it, they, one, him, her

possessive personal pronouns: mine, yours, ours, hers, its, theirs (or their determinative forms: my, your, our, her, its, their, one's, often paired with a noun that refers back to something mentioned previously)

demonstratives & other determiners: this, these, that, those, some, any, both, enough, neither, none, half, etc. (often functioning as pronouns in anaphoric constructions)

place and time adverbials: here, there, then

comparatives: another, more, fewer, same, different, equally, likewise, similarly

**2. Substitution** – more generally, we may replace one phrase with another that means the same thing either to avoid repetition, or to clarify or specify our meaning. We often use either a more specific word, or a more general one for this. In the latter case, we often substitute indefinite pronouns like *one, some, or any*.

<sup>1</sup> For the moment, we will leave aside the concept of deixis, or references to the speaker's personal, situational, or temporal locus to which parts of discourse may refer. Deixis and anaphora sometimes overlap, but for purposes of understanding our text, at the moment we can simplify matters by focusing only on the latter. For more on deixis, see Stirling & Huddleston, 2016.

*I don't have change. Do you have **any**?* (more general)

*Clarence arrived just as I was making coffee, so I asked him if **he'd** like **some**.*  
(more general)

*After the initial votes for student council have been counted, the three students with the most votes make speeches. **Each candidate** speaks for ten minutes, then the final votes are cast.*

(more specific)

We can use adverbials like *so* and *thus* to replace larger units – objects, complements, or whole clauses. Another common substitution is using a form of the verb “to do” to replace a longer verbal phrase or clause.

*It was terribly cold outside, so the others went inside. Eventually, I **did** too.*

**3. Cohesive nouns** – are nouns that summarize what came before or what is to follow. For example, if I come home and find water all over the floor and see a steady flow coming out from under the sink, and it takes me hour to find a night plumber who will come, and a few more hours to have the pipe fixed, and then a couple of hours to clean up the mess, so I only get to sleep at 3:00 in the morning and then oversleep, so that I arrive late to class the next day, I might apologize by explaining what happened, and that this “problem” made me late. “Problem” refers back to the whole unhappy set of circumstances I've described already. Often, the very use of such a word characterizes what will follow, making it easier for a reader or listener to predict what's next. So, if you come into class a few minutes late and say, “*So, there was a problem. . . .*” I already know that what follows will probably be a sad story about unfortunate events that made it impossible for you to do your homework or arrive on time.

**4. Ellipsis** – so, if “problem” is a short way to talk about the whole situation, ellipsis is even shorter. Ellipsis is when you leave out words that are understood. Wait, you may say, how can leaving words out make things more clear? But we do this all the time. “*He can't swim but I can.*” What can I do? I can swim – that is quite clear and, in fact, it would sound rather awkward to say “*He can't swim but I can swim.*” That sounds like a child's speech and, in fact, children only learn ellipsis as they become more linguistically mature. So, sometimes, whole sections of sentences, often the predicates or verbal parts, are left out because they are clear between speakers or writer and reader. Sometimes this absence is even a form of emphasis. Look for this when you read, and you will understand more of the writer's meaning and tone.

**5. Lexis (lexical chains)** – sometimes words come bound up like a pile of presents one atop the other; once we open one, we have a very good idea what the others will be. For example, if, at your wedding, you receive twenty matching boxes of various sizes and the first one is a plate, you can guess the others are likely to be matching bowls, saucers, and perhaps a serving platter or two. In the same way, once I say “wedding” you know from experience that certain other words are likely to follow, like “bride”, “groom”, “reception”, “flowers”, “dress”, “honeymoon”, “cake”, etc. These words are linked into a chain of meaning so that one helps you understand the others; they are a **lexical set**.

Sometimes pairs or groups of words have a more specific linkage of meaning, such as a part-to-whole relationship, e.g., branch/leaf/bark are all parts of a tree. This relation is called **meronymy**. Or they may have a category/subcategory relationship, also called a **superordinate/hyponym** relationship, for example, tree, a general word, covers many specific types like pine/oak/birch. Words that mean the same thing are **synonyms**, like health/wellness, while those that mean the opposite are **antonyms**, like health/sickness. Using pairs of words like these often tells us two parts of a text go together. We saw this in several places in the essay you read today – the author first talked about “*advantages*” and then “*drawbacks*” so we expected negatives to follow in the text after he made this contrast and mentioned “drawbacks.” By the end of the essay, these points could be tallied up into positives and negatives as we did on the board. In fact, writers use all of these types of lexical relationships to link different sentences or paragraphs together to make an overall point. And, of course, we use these lexical relationships in speech as well because they make what we say much easier for others to understand.

**6. Conjunction** – this is what linked those positives and negatives described above into a contrasting relationship in the essay today. See the “*however*” in the last line of the first paragraph? This is one of the methods of cohesion we’re taught explicitly when we learn to write. We are taught to use phrases like “*because*”, “*moreover*”, “*firstly*”, “*secondly*”, “*therefore*”, “*in addition*”, and other similar expressions to link our clauses, sentences, or paragraphs together in an organized way that makes their relationship to each other clear to a reader. Here, “conjunction” refers generally to this relationship, rather than specifically to the words called “conjunctions” in a grammar book (like *and*, *but*, *or*). When we talk about conjunction as a cohesive device, we mean ways to relate two clauses, sentences, or paragraphs together into a functional relationship. The relationship can be additive, adversative, causal, or temporal. For example, one clause may be the reason for the other: *He finished the pizza **because** he was hungry*. This could have been two separate sentences, but since they have a cause-effect relationship, we can link them together with “*because*” (an actual conjunction) to make this relationship more clear. Likewise, in our essay today, the author gives several reasons why watching TV can be bad, and organizes them into a kind of list by starting with “*First of all*” then

“*Secondly*”, (these are adverbs, by the way) then “*The third negative feature*” (a noun phrase) but all three of these paragraph starters are examples of conjunction as a cohesive device. They work by linking pieces of text together so that, while you are reading, you can follow along and see the relationship of one part to another. In our *Visual Media* article, these paragraph starters show us that the facts within each paragraph are to be added to the author's list supporting his main point, as he builds his case against TV watching by adding up all the bad things it can do. These paragraph starters also refer back to the phrase “*several serious drawbacks*” in the first paragraph, where the author promised to describe the pros and cons of TV watching.

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