**Coherence**

In a coherent paragraph, each sentence relates clearly to the topic sentence or controlling idea, but there is more to coherence than this. If a paragraph is coherent, each sentence flows smoothly into the next without obvious shifts or jumps. A coherent paragraph also highlights the ties between old and new information to make the structure of ideas or arguments clear to the reader. One technique of creating coherence is patterns of organization:

**chronological Order (order of Time)**

In **chronological order** or **time order**, items, events, or even ideas are arranged in the order in which they occur. This pattern is marked by such transitions as *next, then, the following morning, a few hours later, still later, that Wednesday, by noon, when she was seventeen, before the sun rose, that April*, and so on.

Chronological order can suit different rhetorical modes or patterns of exposition. It naturally fits in narration, because when we tell a story, we usually follow the order in which events occur. Chronological order applies to process in the same way, because when we describe or explain how something happens or works, we usually follow the order in which the events occur. But chronological order may also apply to example, description, or parts of any other pattern of exposition.

**Spatial Order**

Another principle of organization is **spatial order**. In this pattern, items are arranged according to their physical position or relationships. In describing a shelf or desk, I might describe items on the left first, then move gradually toward the right. Describing a room, I might start with what I see as I enter the door, then what I see as I step to the middle of the room, and finally the far side. In explaining some political or social problem, I might discuss first the concerns of the East Coast, then those of the Midwest, then those of the West Coast. Describing a person, I might start at the feet and move up to the head, or just the other way around. This pattern might use such transitions as *just to the right, a little further on, to the south of Memphis, a few feet behind, in New Mexico, turning left on the pathway*, and so on. Spatial order is pretty common in description, but can also apply to examples, to some comparisons, some classifications [the southern species of this bird . . . ; rhinos in Southeast Asia . . .], some narrations [meanwhile, out on the prairie ], and other forms of exposition as well.

**Climactic Order (Order of Importance)**

A third common principle of organization is **climactic order** or **order of importance**. In this pattern, items are arranged from least important to most important. Typical transitions would include *more important, most difficult, still harder, by far the most expensive, even more damaging, worse yet,* and so on. This is a flexible principle of organization, and may guide the organization of all or part of example, comparison & contrast, cause & effect, and description.

A variation of climactic order is called **psychological order**. This pattern or organization grows from our learning that readers or listeners usually give most attention to what comes at the beginning and the end, and least attention to what is in the middle. In this pattern, then, you decide what is most important and put it at the beginning or the end; next you choose what is second most important and put it at the end or the beginning (whichever remains); the less important or powerful items are then arranged in the middle. If the order of importance followed **1, 2, 3, 4, 5,** with 5 being most important, psychological order might follow the order **4, 3, 1, 2, 5**.

**Second technique for a coherent paragraph is repetition of key words:**

Particularly in paragraphs in which you define or identify an important idea or theory, be consistent in how you refer to it. This consistency and repetition will bind the paragraph together and help the reader understand your definition or description.

**Create parallel structures.**

Parallel structures are created by constructing two or more phrases or sentences that have the same grammatical structure and use the same parts of speech. By creating parallel structures, you make your sentences clearer and easier to read. In addition, repeating a pattern in a series of consecutive sentences helps your reader see the connections between ideas. In the paragraph above about scientists and the sense of sight, several sentences in the body of the paragraph have been constructed in a parallel way. The parallel structures (which have been underlined) help the reader see that the paragraph is organized as a set of examples of a general statement

Use transition words

Transitional expressions emphasize the relationships between ideas, so they help readers follow your train of thought or see connections that they might otherwise miss or misunderstand. The following paragraph shows how carefully chosen transitions (underlined) lead the reader smoothly from the introduction to the conclusion of the paragraph.

**To show addition:**

again, and, also, besides, equally important, first (second, etc.), further, furthermore, in

addition, in the first place, moreover, next, too

**To give examples:**

for example, for instance, in fact, specifically, that is, to illustrate

**To compare**:

although, and yet, at the same time, but, despite, even though, however, in contrast, in spite of,

nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand,still,though, yet

**To summarize or conclude:**

all in all, in conclusion, in other words, in short, in summary, on the whole, that is, therefore, to sum up

**To show time:**

after, afterward, as long as, as soon as, at last, before, during, earlier, finally,formerly, immediately, later, meanwhile, next, since, shortly, subsequently, then, thereafter, until, when, while

**To indicate logical relationship:**

accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, for this reason, hence, if, otherwise, since, so, then, therefore, thus.