

Improving Your Writing Style

Cohesion and Paragraphing

In this lecture we are going to consider the importance of cohesion in academic writing. I hope that you are going to follow the given instructions for the lecture will be of a practical nature.

1- Read the following passage without analyzing or thinking too much about it. Just try to articulate what it feels like to read such a paragraph.

There is also a capability for human-to-human coronavirus transmission. The recently emerged Middle East respiratory coronavirus (Mers-Cov) had infected 701 people, with a fatality rate of 36%. Bats are the likely natural reservoir, and camels are the likely intermediate hosts as suggested by the coronavirus surveillance studies. Either directly or through camels, there is a constant and long-term threat to human health because of cross-species transmission of Mers-Cov from bats to humans. HKU4 and HKU5 are two bat coronaviruses which are genetically related to Mers-Cov.

After reading the paragraph there is a likelihood of characterizing it by being fragmented, choppy, disconnected and unfocused. The reason behind that lies in breaching the most important principle of cohesion which is “present familiar before new information!” I want you then to underline what it seems familiar to you in each sentence of the paragraph relying on the information provided in the preceded sentence/ sentences.

- The familiar information is always found at the end of sentences as follows:

There is also a capability for human-to-human coronavirus transmission. The recently emerged Middle East respiratory coronavirus (Mers-Cov) had infected 701 people, with a fatality rate of 36%. Bats are the likely natural reservoir, and camels are the likely intermediate hosts as suggested by the coronavirus surveillance studies. Either directly or through camels, there is a constant and long-term threat to human health because of cross-species transmission of Mers-Cov from bats to humans. HKU4 and HKU5 are two bat coronaviruses which are genetically related to Mers-Cov.

Now compare the above paragraph with the original one:

The recently emerged Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-Cov) had infected 701 people, with a fatality rate of 36%, and had demonstrated the capability for human-to-human transmission. Alarmingly, coronavirus surveillance studies have suggested that MERS-Cov originated from animals, with bats as the likely natural reservoir, and camels as the likely intermediate hosts. Hence, cross-species transmission of MERS-Cov from bats to humans, either directly or through camels, poses a constant and long-term threat to human health. Phylogenetic analysis

has revealed that MERS-Cov is genetically related to two bat coronaviruses, HKU4 and HKU5.¹

The second paragraph allows you to follow a sense of logic, if I may say, through making you constructing new knowledge depending on already familiar information. That is indeed what logic is, moving from the known to unlock the unknown. So, what exactly is familiar information?

Familiar Information

There are different ways through which you can make your target reader familiar with your text. That could be through the repetition of the main subject/ or subjects that are directly related to the theme of the text, an example from the passage is the repetition of the acronym MERS-Cov. Another way of realizing cohesion is by taking subjects from previous sentences to start your new sentences, for instance, starting the second sentence with the word “coronavirus”. In other cases the object of the first sentence becomes the subject of the following one as in “*Three of the confirmed cases of novel coronavirus infection were identified in the United Kingdom (UK) as part of a cluster within one family (6). The index patient in the cluster, a man aged 60 years with a history of recent travel to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, developed...²*”. That is considered as a technique to move from A to B, B to C, then from C to D... etc.

Introductory phrases and connecting words that connect to previous sentences “Alarmingly and hence” make it smooth to move from one idea to another. However, it is not always advised to overuse them so that you fall in what is called a “fake cohesion”. It is like you are forcing two sentences to be connected. Moving from A to B technique is more suitable.

Sometimes the use of universal words makes the reader comfortable since they know what those words indicate. For example, the use of “we, current research, this paper...etc”. It will also be coherent in the second sentence of the tackled paragraph if it is directly started by the word “studies” instead of “coronavirus surveillance studies”.

¹ *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* Vol. 111, No. 34 (August 26, 2014), pp. 12516-12521

https://www.jstor.org/stable/43043162?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=coronavirus&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dcoronavirus%26amp%3Bacc%3Doff%26amp%3Bwc%3Don%26amp%3Bfc%3Doff%26amp%3Bgroup%3Dnone&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5152%2Ftest&refreqid=search%3A857a6bf1263509de563112c56deadcca&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

² *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Vol. 62, No. 10 (March 15, 2013).

https://www.jstor.org/stable/24846078?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=coronavirus&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dcoronavirus%26amp%3Bfilter%3D&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5152%2Ftest&refreqid=search%3A2b2f186d057b07cf5af9c4f2a3ed9a96&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents