

## Coherence

### More on Unity and Focus

When you write, you have to guide and direct your reader through the relationship of your ideas. It's like you are giving some friends directions from Houston to Austin. In order for your friends not to get lost, you must give them signals and signposts that direct them to their destination. You must keep your reader focused on your thesis (your destination) and help them to see throughout the essay where they are in terms of developing and supporting this thesis. It is worth hearing a few words on following a writer's ideas from Peter Elbow:

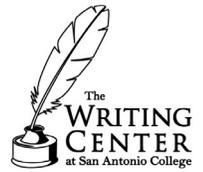
The problem with much poor or needlessly difficult writing is the way it pretends to exist as it were in space rather than in time. Such writing is hard to read because it demands that we [the reader] have access all at once to the many elements that the writer struggled to get into the text. ...Poor writers often assume that because they are making a document rather than talking, they are *giving us a thing in space* rather than *leading us on a journey through time*, and that therefore they can pretend that we can "look at the whole thing."

One of the marks of good writers, on the other hand, is their recognition that readers, like listeners, are indeed trapped in the flow of time and can take in only a few words at a time. ... The drama of movement through time can be embodied in thinking and exposition as naturally as in stories. And the ability to engage the reader's time sense is not a matter of developing some wholly new skill or strategy, it is a matter of developing for writing that time-bound faculty we've all used in all speaking. (161-162)

One of the most important signals to give your reader in the "narrative of your ideas" is when you go from one PRIMARY SUPPORT to another. Since each Body paragraph develops one Primary Support, these signals come in the form of transition sentences. For example, notice how the topic sentences from the Model Essay help to connect the flow of ideas in the essay:

Paragraph #2	First of all, the government should crack down on TV violence because the violence is too excessive.
Paragraph #3	Secondly, the government should limit TV violence because the government is the best institution to do the regulation.
Paragraph #4	Finally, and most importantly, we must get the government to limit TV violence for the sake of our society, especially our children.

### The Key to Coherence: Topic/Transition/Linking Sentences



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I call this signal when you move from one primary support to the next a "Topic/Transition/Linking" sentence. A Topic/Transition/Linking Sentence comes in the first sentence of each body paragraph and DOES three things:

- 1) It gives a signal word (a transition telling the reader here is a primary support) 2) It reconnects with or restates the thesis
- 3) It presents the primary support (reason) to be focused on in that paragraph Look at this example from an argument/persuasion essay:

Position: The government should not regulate TV violence.

---signal--- | -----link to thesis----- | -----primary support (reason)-----

P#2: **First of all, I oppose this government regulation because it is censorship and violates the first amendment freedom of speech.**

Signal | -----link to thesis----- | -----primary support (reason)-----  
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P#3: **In addition, this regulation is a bad idea because it would hurt the networks' business.**

Signal | -----link to thesis----- | -----primary support (reason)

P#4: **Finally, I believe the government should not regulate TV violence because it is not necessary--TV is not the cause of violence in America.**

Think of these sentences like a one-two-three punch: transition-link-reason.

One more example will help you see how these transition sentences work even better. This example comes from a process analysis essay:

Essay Question: How do you build a deck?  
Building a deck falls into four distinct phases. Position:

Signal | -----link to thesis----- | -----primary support -----

P#2: **The first phase of building a deck is the planning and design phase.**

Signal | -----link to thesis----- | -----primary support -----  
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P#3: **The next phase in the deck building process is to purchase your lumber and materials.**

-signal- | -----link to thesis----- | ----  
primary support-----

P#4: **Now, you are ready for the most fun phase of building your deck: the construction phase.**

Signal | -----link to thesis----- | -----primary support -----  
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P#5: **The final phase in the deck building process is staining and treating your new deck.**