



# **DBB 308 WRITING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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# Unity and Coherence

- ▶ An important element of a good paragraph is **unity**. Unity means that a paragraph discusses one and only one main idea from beginning to end. **For example**, if your paragraph is about the advantages of owning a compact car, discuss only that.
- ▶ Sometimes it is possible to discuss more than one aspect of the same idea in one paragraph **if they are closely related to each other**.
- ▶ **For example**, you could discuss gas economy and low maintenance costs in the same paragraph because they are closely related, but you should not discuss both gas economy and easier parking in the same paragraph because they are not closely related.

- ▶ The second part of unity is that **every supporting sentence must *directly* explain or prove the main idea.**
- ▶ **For example,** in a paragraph about the high cost of prescription drugs in the United States, you could mention buying drugs from pharmacies outside the United States as an alternative, but if you write several sentences about buying drugs outside the United States, you are getting off the topic, and your paragraph will not have unity.

# Practice

- ▶ Read the paragraphs. Only one of them shows unity.

### Paragraph 1

#### Effects of Color

Colors create biological reactions in our bodies. These reactions, in turn, can change our behavior. In one study, prisoners were put in a pink room, and they underwent a drastic and measurable decrease in muscle strength and hostility within 2.7 seconds. In another study, athletes needing short bursts of energy were exposed to red light. Their muscle strength increased by 13.5 percent, and electrical activity in their arm muscles increased by 5.8 percent. Athletes needing more endurance for longer performances responded best when exposed to blue light. Other studies have shown that the color green is calming. Green was a sacred color to the Egyptians, representing the hope and joy of spring. It is also a sacred color to Moslems. Many mosques and religious temples throughout the world use green (the color of renewal and growth) and blue (the color of heaven) to balance heavenly peace with spiritual growth. To sum up, color influences us in many ways (Daniels 10).<sup>1</sup>

### Paragraph 2

#### Effects of Color

Colors create biological reactions in our bodies. These reactions, in turn, can change our behavior. In one study, prisoners were put in a pink room, and they underwent a drastic and measurable decrease in muscle strength and hostility within 2.7 seconds. In another study, athletes needing short bursts of energy were exposed to red light. Their muscle strength increased by 13.5 percent, and electrical activity in their arm muscles increased by 5.8 percent. Athletes needing more endurance for longer performances responded best when exposed to blue light. Other studies have shown that the color green is calming. After London's Blackfriars Bridge was painted green, the number of suicides decreased by 34 percent. These and other studies clearly demonstrate that color affects not only our moods but our behavior as well (Daniels 10).

### Paragraph 3

#### Effects of Color

Colors create biological reactions in our bodies. These reactions, in turn, can change our behavior. In one study, athletes needing short bursts of energy were exposed to red light. Their muscle strength increased by 13.5 percent, and electrical activity in their arm muscles increased by 5.8 percent. Athletes needing more endurance for longer performances responded best when exposed to blue light. Blue is not a good color for dinnerware, however. Food looks less appetizing when it is served on blue plates, perhaps because very few foods in nature are of that color. Other studies have shown that the color green is calming. After London's Blackfriars Bridge was painted green, the number of suicides from it decreased by 34 percent. It is clear that color affects not just our moods, but our behavior as well (Daniels 10).

- ▶ **2nd paragraph** has unity.
- ▶ **1st paragraph** does not have unity because it discusses two different topics.
- ▶ **3rd paragraph** does not have unity because it has sentences that are not related to the main topic.

# Practice

- ▶ Both of the following paragraphs break the rule of unity because they contain one or more sentences that are off the topic.
- ▶ **Step 1** Locate and underline the topic sentence of each paragraph.  
**Step 2** Cross out the sentence or sentences that are off the topic.



### Paragraph 1

Adventure travel is the hot trend in the tourism industry. Ordinary people are no longer content to spend their two weeks away from the office resting on a sunny beach in Florida. More and more often, they are choosing to spend their vacations rafting down wild rivers, hiking through steamy rain forests, climbing the world's highest mountains, or crossing slippery glaciers.<sup>1</sup> People of all ages are choosing educational study tours for their vacations.

### Paragraph 2

Daredevil<sup>2</sup> sports are also becoming popular. Young people especially are increasingly willing to risk life and limb<sup>3</sup> while mountain biking, backcountry snowboarding, or high-speed skateboarding. Soccer is also popular in the United States now, although football is still more popular. One of the riskiest new sports is skysurfing, in which people jump out of airplanes with boards attached to their feet. Skysurfing rivals<sup>4</sup> skydiving and bungee jumping for the amount of thrills—and risk.

1 glaciers: slowly moving rivers of ice

2 daredevil: very dangerous

3 life and limb: death and injury (idiom)

4 rivals: competes with

# Practice

- ▶ Both of the following paragraphs not only have sentences that are off the topic but also discuss two or more topics.
- ▶ **Step 1** Decide where each paragraph should be divided into two paragraphs. Underline the topic sentence of each.  
**Step 2** Find sentence(s) that are off the topic and cross them out.

### Paragraph 1

Because the Internet makes the world a smaller place, the value of having a common language is greatly increased. The question is—which language? Because the Internet grew up in the United States, the largest percentage of its content is now in English. Bill Gates, Microsoft’s president, believes that English will remain valuable for a long time as a common language for international communication. His company spends \$200 million a year translating software into other languages. He says, “Unless you read English passably well, you miss out on some of the Internet experience.” Someday, software may be available to instantly translate both written and spoken language so well that the need for any common language could decline. That day is decades away, however, because flawless machine translation is a very tough problem. Computer spelling checkers also exist for various languages. Software that does crude<sup>5</sup> translations already exists. It is useful if all you are trying to do is understand the general idea of something you see on your computer screen. However, if you are trying to negotiate a contract or discuss a scientific subject where details are important, machine translation is totally useless (Gates).<sup>6</sup>

5 crude: rough, unfinished

### Paragraph 2

Even when you try to be polite, it is easy to do the wrong thing inadvertently<sup>7</sup> in a new culture. For example, when someone offers you food or a beverage in the United States, accept it the first time it is offered. If you say, “No, thank you” because it is polite to decline the first one or two offers in your culture, you could become very hungry and thirsty in the United States. There, a host thinks that “no” means “no” and will usually not offer again. Meals in the United States are usually more informal than meals in other countries, and the times of meals may be different. Although North Americans are usually very direct in social matters, there are a few occasions when they are not. If a North American says, “Please drop by sometime,” he may or may not want you to visit him in his home. Your clue that this may not be a real invitation is the word “sometime.” In some areas of the United States, people do not expect you to visit them unless you have an invitation for a specific day and time. In other areas of the United States, however, “dropping by” is a friendly, neighborly gesture. Idioms are often difficult for newcomers to understand.

**7 inadvertently: accidentally**

# Coherence

- ▶ Another element of a good paragraph is **coherence**. The Latin verb **cohere** means "**hold together**." For coherence in writing, the sentences must hold together; that is, the movement from one sentence to the next must be logical and smooth. There must be no sudden jumps. Each sentence should flow smoothly into the next one.
- ▶ There are **four ways** to achieve coherence:
  1. Repeat key nouns.
  2. Use consistent pronouns.
  3. Use transition signals to link ideas.
  4. Arrange your ideas in logical order.

# Repetition of key nouns

- ▶ The easiest way to achieve coherence is **to repeat key nouns frequently** in your paragraph. You should repeat a key noun instead of using a pronoun when the meaning is not clear.
- ▶ Read the model paragraph about gold to see how it uses this technique to smooth the flow of sentences. The key noun in this paragraph is **gold**. Circle the word **gold** and **all pronouns** that refer to it.

## Gold

<sup>1</sup>Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics. <sup>2</sup>First of all, gold has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion. <sup>3</sup>Therefore, it is suitable for jewelry, coins, and ornamental purposes. <sup>4</sup>Gold never needs to be polished and will remain beautiful forever. <sup>5</sup>For example, a Macedonian coin remains as untarnished today as the day it was made 25 centuries ago. <sup>6</sup>Another important characteristic of gold is its usefulness to industry and science. <sup>7</sup>For many years, it has been used in hundreds of industrial applications, such as photography and dentistry. <sup>8</sup>The most recent use of gold is in astronauts' suits. <sup>9</sup>Astronauts wear gold-plated heat shields for protection when they go outside spaceships in space. <sup>10</sup>In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

- ▶ You should have circled the noun **gold seven times**, the pronoun **it twice**, and the pronoun **its three times**.
- ▶ Read the following paragraph, the word **gold** has been replaced by pronouns, making the paragraph much **less coherent**.



### **Gold**

Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics. First of all, it has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion. Therefore, it is suitable for jewelry, coins, and ornamental purposes. It never needs to be polished and will remain beautiful forever. For example, a Macedonian coin remains as untarnished today as the day it was made 25 centuries ago. Another of its important characteristics is its usefulness to industry and science. For many years, it has been used in hundreds of industrial applications, such as photography and dentistry. Its most recent use is in astronauts' suits. Astronauts wear heat shields made from it for protection when they go outside spaceships in space. In conclusion, it is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

# Practice

- ▶ In the following paragraph, the key noun is never repeated. **Replace the pronoun *it* with the key noun *English*** wherever you think doing so would make the paragraph more coherent.

## English

<sup>1</sup>English has almost become an international language. <sup>2</sup>Except for Chinese, more people speak it than any other language. <sup>3</sup>Spanish is the official language of more countries in the world, but more countries have it as their official or unofficial second language. <sup>4</sup>More than 70 percent of the world's mail is written in it. <sup>5</sup>It is the primary language on the Internet. <sup>6</sup>In international business, it is used more than any other language, and it is the language of airline pilots and air traffic controllers all over the world. <sup>7</sup>Moreover, although French used to be the language of diplomacy, it has displaced it throughout the world. <sup>8</sup>Therefore, unless you plan to spend your life alone on a desert island in the middle-of the Pacific Ocean, it is a useful language to know.

# Key noun substitutes

- ▶ If you do not wish to repeat a key noun again and again, you can use synonyms or expressions with the same meaning.
- ▶ **Examples:** use-application
- ▶           useful-beneficial

## Consistent Pronouns

- When you use pronouns, make sure that you use the same person and number throughout your paragraph. Notice the changes the writer made for consistency in the following example.

~~A student~~ <sup>Students</sup> who ~~knows~~ <sup>know</sup> a few Latin and Greek roots and prefixes ~~has~~ <sup>have</sup> an advantage over ~~a student~~ <sup>students</sup> who ~~does not~~ <sup>do not</sup> know them. They can often guess the meaning of new words. If, for example, ~~you~~ <sup>students</sup> know that the prefix *omni* means "all," ~~you~~ <sup>they</sup> have a better chance of guessing the meanings of words such as *omnibus*, *omnipresent*, and *omnidirectional*. Furthermore, ~~a student~~ <sup>students</sup> who ~~knows~~ <sup>know</sup> that the root *sci-* comes from *scire*, "to know," can guess that *omniscient* means "all-knowing."

# Practice

- ▶ In the following paragraph, the pronouns are not consistent. Correct them to make this paragraph more coherent.



## **Olympic Athletes**

Olympic athletes must be strong both physically and mentally. First of all, if you hope to compete in an Olympic sport, you must be physically strong. Furthermore, aspiring<sup>4</sup> Olympians must train rigorously<sup>5</sup> for many years. For the most demanding sports, they train several hours a day, five or six days a week, for ten or more years. In addition to being physically strong, athletes must also be mentally tough. This means that you have to be totally dedicated to your sport, often giving up a normal school, family, and social life. Being mentally strong also means that he or she must be able to withstand the intense pressure of international competition with its accompanying media<sup>6</sup> coverage. Finally, not everyone can win a medal, so Olympians must possess the inner strength to live with defeat.

# Transition Signals

- ▶ Transition signals are expressions such as **first**, **finally**, and **however**, or phrases such as **in conclusion**, **on the other hand**, and **as a result**. Other kinds of words such as subordinators (*when, although*), coordinators (**and**, **but**), adjectives (**another**, **additional**), and prepositions (**because of**, **in spite of**) can serve as transition signals.
- ▶ Transition signals give a paragraph coherence because they guide the reader from one idea to the next.
- ▶ Compare paragraphs 1 and 2 that follow. Which paragraph contains transition signals and is more coherent? Circle all the transition signals you can identify.

### Paragraph 1

One difference among the world's seas and oceans is that the salinity<sup>7</sup> varies in different climate zones. The Baltic Sea in northern Europe is only one-fourth as salty as the Red Sea in the Middle East. There are reasons for this. In warm climates, water evaporates<sup>8</sup> rapidly. The concentration<sup>9</sup> of salt is greater. The surrounding land is dry and does not contribute much freshwater to dilute<sup>10</sup> the salty seawater. In cold climate zones, water evaporates slowly. The runoff created by melting snow adds a considerable amount of freshwater to dilute the saline seawater.

**7 salinity: salt content**

**8 evaporates: dries up**

**9 concentration: percentage (of salt)**

**10 dilute: reduce the concentration**



**Paragraph 2**

One difference among the world's seas and oceans is that the salinity varies in different climate zones. For example, the Baltic Sea in northern Europe is only one-fourth as saline as the Red Sea in the Middle East. There are two reasons for this. First of all, in warm climate zones, water evaporates rapidly; therefore, the concentration of salt is greater. Second, the surrounding land is dry; consequently, it does not contribute much freshwater to dilute the salty seawater. In cold climate zones, on the other hand, water evaporates slowly. Furthermore, the runoff created by melting snow adds a considerable amount of freshwater to dilute the saline seawater.

- ▶ Paragraph 2 is more coherent because it contains transition signals. Each transition signal has a special meaning; each shows how the following sentence relates to the preceding one.

## Transition Signals

Meaning/ Function	Transition Phrases	Conjunctive Adverbs	Coordinating Conjunctions	Subordinating Conjunctions	Others
To introduce an <b>additional idea</b>	in addition	furthermore moreover besides also too	and		another (+ noun) an additional (+ noun)
To introduce an <b>opposite idea or contrast</b>	on the other hand in contrast	however nevertheless instead still nonetheless	but yet	although though even though whereas while	in spite of (+ noun) despite (+ noun)
To introduce a <b>choice or alternative</b>		otherwise	or	if unless	
To introduce a <b>restatement or explanation</b>	in fact indeed	that is			
To list in <b>order</b>	first, second, third next, last, finally				the first, second, third, etc. the next, last, final
To introduce an <b>example</b>	for example for instance				an example of (+ noun) such as (+ noun)
To introduce a <b>conclusion or summary</b>	clearly in brief in conclusion indeed in short in summary				
To introduce a <b>result</b>	accordingly as a result as a consequence	therefore consequently hence thus	so		

- ▶ Most words and phrases in the first two columns of the chart can appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of one independent clause and are usually separated by commas.
- ▶ **Examples:**
- ▶ **For example**, the Baltic Sea in northern Europe is only one-fourth as saline as the Red Sea in the Middle East.
- ▶ The runoff created by melting snow, **furthermore**, adds a considerable amount of freshwater to dilute the saline seawater.
- ▶ The Mediterranean Sea is more saline than the Red Sea, **however**.

## ► EXCEPTIONS

- 1. The words and phrases in the last four groups in the chart (for listing ideas and time sequences, for emphasizing, for giving reasons, and for conclusions) usually appear only at the beginning of a sentence, not in the middle or at the end.
- 2. **Too** usually appears only at the end of a sentence, sometimes preceded by a comma.
- 3. The short time words **then**, **now**, and **soon** usually do not need commas.

- ▶ The words and phrases in the first two columns of the chart can also connect two independent clauses. In this case, we use them with a semicolon and a comma.

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE  
 In warm climate zones, water evaporates rapidly; **therefore,** INDEPENDENT CLAUSE  
the concentration of salt is greater.

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE  
 Both the Red Sea and the Mediterranean have narrow outlets to the ocean;  
INDEPENDENT CLAUSE  
**however,** the Mediterranean's is narrower.

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE  
 A few societies in the world are matriarchal; **that is,** INDEPENDENT CLAUSE  
 the mother is head of the family.

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE  
 Some English words have no exact equivalents in other languages; **for example,**  
INDEPENDENT CLAUSE  
 there is no German word for the adjective *fair*, as in *fair play*.

**independent clause: group of words containing a subject and a verb that expresses a complete thought**