

Writing a paper that is clear and connected starts at the beginning of the writing process.

Define your writing goals

- Make sure you understand your assignment thoroughly.
- Choose a focused topic, understanding that it may shift as you continue to plan.
- Consider your audience. Write with them in mind. What tone is appropriate when writing to this audience? What do they need to know to understand your paper? Usually, your professor will want you to write with a broader audience than them in mind. If you are writing with publication in mind, what type of journal might you submit it to, and what do readers of that journal expect to see in an article published there?

Deepen your understanding *before* you start drafting

- Research your topic. What is the current academic discourse about your topic? What secondary sources might you use, and how will you engage with them in your paper? (Note: Research can be broad or narrow. It may include dozens of academic articles or a close reading of one poem. Your assignment will often define what type of research is necessary.)
- Outline potential sections of your paper. Are you following a specific format, such as IMRAD (Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion)? Will you support your thesis using many examples, or analyze many parts of one example thoroughly?
- Organize your supporting source material into the sections of your outline. Sometimes, if for example you want to write a comparison/contrast paper, you'd most likely start by organizing supporting sources by main idea, or side they're on, or similarities or differences, etc.

Draft your paper!

- Write a *working* thesis (one that you may come back and change later as your writing progresses).
- **Cohesion:** For each paragraph and/or section, write an introductory sentence (or a few) that presents your first idea. Write a sentence (or a few) that tie in your key sources and/or evidence.
- **Coherence:** Write a sentence (or a few) that explains, analyzes, or discusses your key sources and/or evidence.
- **Cohesion:** Write a sentence (or a few) that connects this source and/or evidence to the next source or piece of evidence in the paragraph (or main idea of the paragraph, if there is only one). Lastly, write a sentence that connects these ideas to your thesis.

Whether you revise as you go or after writing a draft of your whole paper, consider the following:

- Does your **introduction** (and abstract, if you have one) match your paper? Your introduction is critical to clarity in your paper because it prepares your audience for the rest of your paper. Consider going through your paper and making a list of the main ideas (for more on this technique, see the “Reverse Outline” handout). Generally speaking, you should allude to most of these ideas in your introduction, and you should not include details in your introduction that are not key to your paper as a whole. Some academic fields require a procedural introduction in which you state your main argument and subtopics clearly, while other fields discourage this convention. Read articles from your field and discuss introductions with others from your department to determine which method is appropriate.
- Do you have a topic sentence—a sentence that signals the main point of the paragraph?
- Do you have a summary sentence—a sentence that summarizes the ideas of the paragraph?
- Are there words or phrases in your topic sentence or summary sentence that make explicit connections to the thesis statement or main idea?
- Are there words in your topic sentence or summary sentence that connect the ideas in the paragraphs to the previous or following paragraphs?
- Are there **cohesive devices** that connect ideas and sentences to one another? Include transitional phrases and cohesive devices when necessary to connect sentences and paragraphs.

Here are a few simple **transitional phrases** to get you started:

cause and effect	therefore, thus, consequently, hence, as a result of
addition	also, and, and then, equally important, finally, first, further, furthermore, in addition, in fact, in the first place, last, moreover, next, second
comparison	also, in the same way, likewise, similarly
contrast and concession	and yet, at the same time, even so, for all that, however, in contrast, in spite of this, instead, nevertheless, on the other hand, yet
emphasis	certainly, indeed, in fact
example or illustration	for example, in conclusion, in other words, namely, specifically, that is, to illustrate, thus
summary	in brief, in other words, in particular, in summary, in short, on the whole, that is, therefore
time sequence	eventually, finally, in the first place, in the past, last, next, second, simultaneously, so far, subsequently, then, thereafter, until now

To make your writing more sophisticated, use **cohesive devices** that fit your argument precisely. Cohesive devices are bolded in the following paragraph:

The escalating pace of academic production across the globe has been well-documented (Apple, 2005; Davies & Bansel, 2010). **As this has occurred**, scholars have identified “a growing sense of ontological insecurity” from “a loss of a sense of meaning in what we do and of what is important in what we do” (Ball, 2012, p. 20). **In**

response, scholars have described the need for a slower pace of production across academia, particularly within social science research. Such descriptions have been framed as slow research (Banks, 2014; Kuus, 2015), slow scholarship (Hartman & Darab, 2012), and even slow science (Owens, 2013). **These calls have been echoed by** researchers concerned about the quality of accelerated scholarship (Cronin, 2013), as well as normative timelines for research that do not allow for disruption, delay, or dalliance (Garey, Hertz, & Nelson, 2014). **In a parallel argument**, Banks (2014) writes that “[s]ocial science academics today are not encouraged to mull things over, or to revisit old ideas or old data, **and in this sense** ‘pure’ academic research is increasingly being replaced by an agenda that resembles commissioned contract research” (p. 69).

In the introduction paragraph above, Ulmer (2017) uses cohesive devices to put several sources in dialogue with each other. It is a common practice in academic papers to write about articles and studies as if their authors were having a conversation.

Connecting sentences using repetition:

Some repetition is okay for clarity’s sake because repetition of keywords (or their synonyms) works as a cohesive device itself. The following paragraph demonstrates effective repetition:

The argument is made not only from a theoretical perspective but also from a pragmatic referral to its **efficacy** in generating transformational learning around teacher identity and practice. This **efficacy** can in part be attributed to the fact that the psychological subject is recognized as *resistant* to change, and a psychotherapeutic pedagogy attempts to harness *resistance* and denial as an optics through which to gain self-awareness and leverage over one’s **thinking, feeling, and doing**. For the psychological subject, change is hard work and involves an engagement of the whole person—**heart, body, and mind**.

In the example above, Keck (2020) uses repetition to help the reader follow his argument, connecting one sentence to another.

Pay attention to pronouns and vague words, swapping them for specific terms.

*Bad example: Most texts on authenticity begin by admitting that amongst the literature, there is not one agreed-upon definition of the word. **This** lends itself to analysis of the tensions and ambivalence held within its connotations.*

*Better example: Most texts on authenticity begin by admitting that amongst the literature, there is not one agreed-upon definition of the word. **The ambiguity in the term** lends itself to analysis of the tensions and ambivalence held within its connotations.*

REFERENCES

- Keck, C. S. (2020). The question teacher and the case for a therapeutic turn in education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 71(4), 409-419.
- Ulmer, J. B. (2017). Writing slow ontology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(3), 201-211.