



Cohesion, Coherence, and Emphasis

Adapted from Chapters 5 & 6 of
Joseph M. Williams'
Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace
by: Lynda Davis

Which paragraph sounds better?

1a) The basis of our American democracy—equal opportunity for all—is being threatened by college costs that have been rising fast for the last several years. Increases in family income have been significantly outpaced by increases in tuition at our colleges and universities during that period. Only the children of the wealthiest families in our society will be able to afford a college education if this trend continues. Knowledge and intellectual skills, in addition to wealth, will divide us as a people, when that happens. Equal opportunity and the egalitarian basis of our democratic society could be eroded by such a divide.

1b) In the last several years, college costs have been rising so fast that they are now threatening the basis of our American democracy—equal opportunity for all. During that period, tuition has significantly outpaced increases in family income. If this trend continues, a college education will soon be affordable only by the children of the wealthiest families in our society. When that happens, we will be divided as a people not only by wealth, but by knowledge and intellectual skills. Such a divide will erode equal opportunities and the egalitarian basis of our democratic society.

Cohesion

- **Cohesion:** A sense of logical connection between sentences. Sentences are cohesive when the last few words of one set up information that appears in the first few words of the next. Think of sentences as a chain—the end of one is connected to the beginning of the next.
 - Organize sentences with familiar (old) information first and new information last.
 - Use clear, logical, specific transitions to identify the relationships between sentences.
 - We judge sequences of sentences to be cohesive depending on how each sentence ends and the next begins.

Coherence

- **Coherence:** A sense of consistent focus in a paragraph, section, or text. Coherence is achieved when the main topic of a paragraph is repeated in consecutive sentences in the form of related nouns and their pronouns which should appear early in each sentence
 - In most of your sentences, start with the subject and make the subject the topic.
 - Limit the number of topics you discuss in a paragraph to one main idea and one or two clearly related subordinate ideas.
 - We judge a whole passage to be *coherent* depending on how the sentences in a passage cumulatively begin.
- **Cohesion + coherence = flow, focus**

In this example, the sentences have been scrambled. Try to assemble the sentences back into their original order. How do you know?

Group Exercise

- 1. Taste and smell that range from sweet to bitter, spicy to smooth, oily to earthy.
- 2. The cigar itself has become a symbol of luxury and extravagance; smoking has been decried a vice, a bad habit.
- 3. These men all had one thing in common: they knew the pleasure of smoking a fine cigar.
- 4. There's an image of the typical cigar smokers: fat, white, rich males smoking cigars and laughing about ruling the world.
- 5. Yet after smoking bans, trade embargos, and price fluctuations, the cigar industry remains a strong and profitable industry, as cigar smoking remains an enjoyable pastime for those who partake.
- 6. While I hope to convince you to try cigar smoking or at least think a little less negatively towards cigars, I at least want to impart to you, dear cigar aficionados, what my personal recommendations are for the brief time that I have been enjoying them.
- 7. Cigar smoking has many quotable fans throughout history, from Sigmund Freud to Winston Churchill to George Burns.

Emphasis

- Which sentence do you like best?
- Ia) A sociometric and actuarial analysis of Social Security revenues and disbursements for the last six decades to determine changes in projecting deficits in the subject of this study.
- Ib) In this study, we analyze Social Security's revenues and disbursements for the last six decades, using sociometric and actuarial criteria to determine changes in projecting deficits.

In the end is my beginning.

T.S. Eliot

- *1. How you **end** a sentence determines how readers judge its clarity and strength*
- *2. End sentences with*
 - *complexity/technical terms*
 - *new information*
 - *most important idea*
- *3. The final few words of a sentence normally receive **stress or emphasis** (as readers hear it in their heads). Make sure those words deserve to be stressed. Weak words at the end of a sentence make the sentence seem weak.*

Strategies for improving emphasis

- Shift less important words or phrases earlier in the sentence
- Shift known information earlier in the sentence
- Shift more important and/or new information to the end of the sentence
- Cut words at the end that are unnecessary
- Start a sentence with there is/are to point to the new information at the end of a sentence (“*There are three reasons to consider graduate school: x, y, and z*”)

Strategies for improving emphasis

- Use “What ... is” constructions, which do the same thing. (*“What causes universities the most concern is the decline in minority applications.”*)
- “Not only, but also” constructions put emphasis on the end of a sentence. (*“Not only children but also communities will benefit from increased spending on education.”*)
- Repeat the words (synonyms, pronouns, words in the same family) that signal the topic of the paragraph (e.g. coherence) at the beginning and ends of sentences.

Revise this sentence

- The role of calcium blocker drugs in the control of cardiac irregularity can be seen through an understanding of the role of calcium in the activation of muscle cells.

Difficult sentence revised

- Ia) The role of calcium blocker drugs in the control of cardiac irregularity can be seen through an understanding of the role of calcium in the activation of muscle cells.
- Ib) When a muscle contracts, it uses calcium. We must therefore understand how calcium affects muscle cells to understand how cardiac irregularity is controlled by drugs called “calcium blockers.”

Here's the point

- Your readers want you to use the end of your sentences to help them manage two kinds of difficulty:
 - long and complex phrases and clauses
 - new information, particularly unfamiliar technical terms.
- *Style*, Lesson 6

Journal Exercise

- Revise the following sentences for emphasis at the end.
1. Lincoln's claim that the Civil War was God's punishment of both North and South for slavery appears in the last part of the speech.
 2. There are limited opportunities for faculty to work with individual students in large American colleges and universities.
 3. Great strides in the early and accurate diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease have been made in recent years.
 4. The teacher who makes an assignment of a long final term paper at the end of the semester and who then gives only a grade and nothing else such as a critical comment is a common object of complaint among students at the college level.

Stress

- We typically stress the last 2 or 3 words at the end of a sentence. If we stress weak words, it makes our argument sound weak.
- Example:
 - Global warming could raise sea levels to a point where much of the world's low-lying coastal areas would disappear, **according to most atmospheric scientists.**
 - According to most atmospheric scientists, global warming could raise sea levels to a point where much of the world's low-lying coastal areas **would disappear.**

Compare: Where's the blame?

- The administration has blurred an issue central to nuclear arms control, **the issue of verification**. Irresponsible charges, innuendo, and leaks have submerged **serious problems with Iranian compliance**. The objective, instead, should be not to exploit these concerns in order to further poison our relations, repudiate existing agreements, or worse still, terminate arms control altogether, but to **insist on compliance and clarify questionable behavior**.
- The issue of verification—so central to arms control—has been **blurred by the administration**. Serious problems with Iranian compliance have been submerged in **irresponsible charges, innuendo, and leaks**. The objective, instead, should be to clarify questionable behavior and insist on compliance—not to exploit these concerns in order to **further poison our relations, repudiate existing agreements, or, worse still, terminate arms control altogether**.

Line by Line Comparison

- The administration has blurred an issue central to nuclear arms control, **the issue of verification.**
- The issue of verification—so central to arms control—has been **blurred by the administration.**

Line by Line Comparison

- Irresponsible charges, innuendo, and leaks have submerged **serious problems with Iranian compliance.**
- Serious problems with Iranian compliance have been submerged in **irresponsible charges, innuendo, and leaks.**

Line by Line Comparison

- The objective, instead, should be not to exploit these concerns in order to further poison our relations, repudiate existing agreements, or worse still, terminate arms control altogether, but to **insist on compliance and clarify questionable behavior.**
- The objective, instead, should be to clarify questionable behavior and insist on compliance—not to exploit these concerns in order to **further poison our relations, repudiate existing agreements, or, worse still, terminate arms control altogether.**

The Point

- Just as you look at the first few words of your sentences for point of view, look at the last few words for special emphasis. You can revise a sentence to emphasize particular words that you want readers to hear stressed and thereby note as particularly significant.

- *Style*, Lesson 6