Telling a coherent story in your research papers

While reviewers and supervisors always want to see a coherent story, few people ever really explain what that actually means. Your paper will have a coherent story if it follows the typical overall organisation, maintains logical flow in each section, has clearly structured paragraphs, and links each idea with the preceding and following one.

**Instructions**

1. Before you start writing a section, refer back to (or complete if you haven’t yet!) your research paper blueprints to ensure you’re including all the elements typically included in that section in your field.
2. Avoid jumping between the themes or ideas
3. Provide clear links between paragraphs:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Example | Referring back to the preceding paragraph at the beginning of a new paragraph | Introducing the topic of the following paragraph in the last sentence |
| Determiners | **This** problem / **These** issues / **Another** advantage / **Such** an approach | n/a |
| Linking words | However/Moreover/On the other hand/Second | n/a |
| Synonyms | This **approach** is typically carried out [the previous paragraph talked about a **method**] | …, which has two main **effects** on online education.  The first impact is evident when… |
| Repeating the key word | **Renewable energy** is also used to… [the previous paragraph talked about renewable energy] | …is frequently applied in **designing online courses**.  **Online course design** follows a typical procedure. |
| My examples |  |  |
|  |  |

1. Copy and paste below a paragraph you have written recently. Analyse it answering the questions below to see if it has the correct structure:

* Is it between 4 and 9 sentences?
* Is it about one main idea?
* Is the main idea expressed in the first sentence?
* Is the paragraph developed from general to specific?
* Is the main take-away message clear?

If you’re not sure, [post it in the community and ask for help](https://academicenglishnow.com/groups/research-paper-mastery/).

Your paragraph:

1. Provide clear links within paragraphs using linking words:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Adding more information** | **Listing** | **Showing similarities** | **Offering further explanation** | **Showing differences** | | **Effects (between two sentences)** | **Cause** | | **Examples** |
| Between two sentences | Within one sentence | Within one sentence | Between two sentences |
| In addition,  Moreover,  Additionally,  Furthermore,  ~~Also,~~  It is **also** clear… | First,  Second,  Third,  Finally,  Subsequently | Likewise,  Similarly,  Similarly to X,  ~~Like X~~ | Indeed,  In other words,  Namely, | However,  Nevertheless,  On the other hand,  In contrast,  ~~But~~ | Although  While  Whereas  Even though  Despite (the fact that)  In spite of (the fact that)  ~~But~~ | Consequently,  As a result,  Thus,  Hence,  Therefore,  ~~So~~  It is **thus** argued | Since  Because  Due to (the fact that)  As  Owing to (the fact that) | One reason for this is…  This can be caused by…  A likely cause for this is… | For example,  For instance  …such as  …~~like~~ |

1. Look at your paragraph again. Add linking words when appropriate to make the connections between ideas clearer.
2. Look at the other way of maintaining a coherent flow in a paragraph. Revise your paragraph again adding any of the below when appropriate.

* Pronouns: they, it, its, their, etc.
* Relative pronouns: which/who/that/whose
  1. use who/that for people when adding necessary information, e.g. The researcher **who/that** first investigated this was
  2. use which/that for things when adding necessary information, e.g. We developed an approach **which/that** consists of…
  3. use which (preceded by a comma) to refer to clauses/phrases, e.g. The entire process can take several hours**, which** means that…
  4. use who for people and which for things (preceded by a comma) when adding extra information about something/one that is known, e.g. Yu (2022)**, who** studied…, showed that…
* Determiners: **These** problems, **Another** benefit, **This** can
* Synonyms or repetition of key ideas (e.g. One challenge this creates is… An additional issue such systems lead to is…)

1. [Share your paragraph in our community](https://academicenglishnow.com/groups/research-paper-mastery/) for feedback.