

What is Writing “Flow”

Writing “**flow**” is one of the most common writing concerns that students identify in their writing, but what exactly is it? Writing flow refers to the **fluency in which readers can approach writing**. Flow is characterized by **coherence** (global organization) and **cohesion** (local organization).



Coherence (Global Organization)

Coherence refers to the global organization of a piece of writing. Global needs of a paper refer broadly to the **overarching order** of a work, such as **paragraph organization** (rather than sentence level). Paragraphs can be organized in several different ways to help writing have a logical flow, including:

Chronological

Grouping Similar Ideas

Large to Small

Argumentative Structure

Scientific Structure

- Following a clear time sequence. Suited well for historical analysis or step-by-step processes.
- Understanding how concepts overlap and organizing like ideas together.
 - Looking at concepts holistically and moving from universal to specific ideas.
 - Following a clear argumentative structure (assertion, evidence, reasoning, rebuttal, conclusion).
 - Following a clear scientific structure (hypothesis, evidence, reasoning).

Strategies for Coherence

Below are some strategies for analyzing writing flow and coherence at the global level:

Color Coding

1. Use different colors to visually mark different ideas expressed in a paper.
2. Create subsections that different ideas may fit into, and map how many ideas are used in a given section.
3. This allows you to see where some sections may have too many/few pieces of evidence.

Examples
on page 2!

Reverse Outlining

1. After writing a piece, go back through each paragraph and write down the main topic of each in the left-hand margin.
2. On the right-hand margin, identify how each paragraph proves the argument.
3. This allows you to see if your paper follows a logical flow!

What is Writing “Flow”

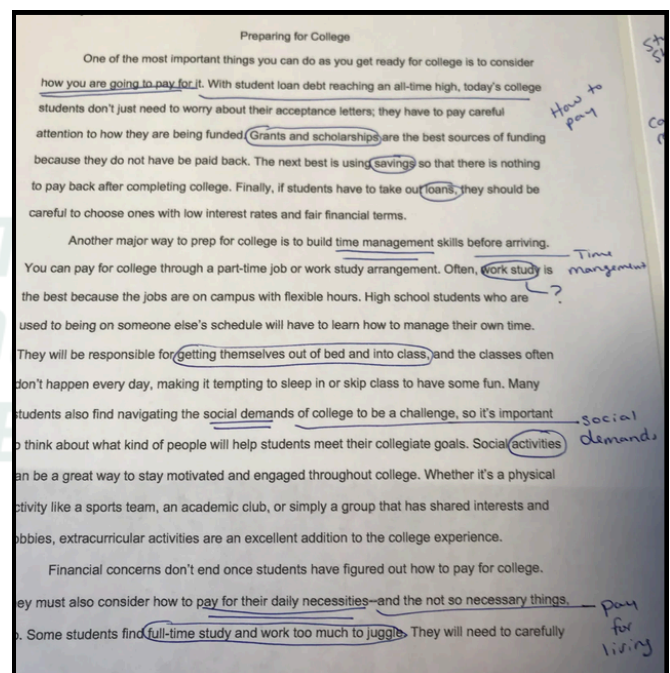
Okonkwo's own behavior reveals the consequences of toxic masculinity. When his own adopted son, Ikemefuna, must be sacrificed, the warrior himself cuts down the boy, who cries, "My father, they have killed me!" Okonkwo, who would rather show himself to be fierce than prove himself to be a good father, succumbs to depression because of the guilt. Even as a husband, he fails. When his third wife goes to get her hair plaited instead of cooking his midday meal, he beats her mercilessly and is punished by the clan because it is the Week of Peace. This man who insists on being in control of others pays a price because he cannot even control his own temper.

Angela Kratzer, "How Color Coding Works in Written Analysis"

Here is an example of a **reverse outline** of a student paper. Note that the student circles important words and underlines to show where their thesis is strengthened. The student then writes notes in the margin about what each paragraph argues and/or how it furthers the thesis.



Here is an example of a **color-coded** paragraph on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where red represents analysis and blue represents evidence. This method visualizes how balanced a paragraph or paper is.



Dayla Learning, "Reverse Outlines: Helping 'Explosive' Writers Organize Their Ideas"

Cohesion (Local Organization)

Coherence refers to the local organization of a piece of writing. Local needs refer broadly to the **fragments or sections of a work**, such as the **sentence level**. Sentences can be organized in several different ways to aid flow, including:

Chronological

- Following a clear time sequence. Suited well for historical analysis or step-by-step processes.

Cause and Effect

- Explaining reasons/causes and results/effects.

Topic and Solution

- Presenting an issue and discussing potential resolutions or solutions.

Large to Small

- Looking at concepts holistically and moving from universal to specific ideas.

Thematic/Topical

- Stringing sentences together by topic or themes presented in the paper.

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Strategies for Cohesion

Below are some strategies for analyzing writing flow and cohesion at the local level:

Transitional Phrases

- Use transitional phrases to seamlessly move between sentences and paragraphs.
- Transitions help ensure flow because they make larger ideas easier to see.

Parallel Structure

- Parallel structure refers to the use of similar grammatical patterns within a sentence
- Parallel structure helps to create rhythm and flow within sentences.

While (1) social media use can be beneficial, many studies demonstrate the harmful effects that usage can have on mental health. **Notably (2)**, a study on university-age students found that excessive use increases sleep disruptions and social isolation. **Therefore (3)**, the more students experienced sleeping difficulties and feelings of loneliness, the more their academic performances suffered. **Overall (4)**, the drawbacks of social media usage outweigh the good.

Not parallel: He likes hiking, swimming, and to ride a bike. (Unparallel “ing” verb usage)

Parallel: He likes hiking, swimming, and riding his bike.

Not parallel: I am ambitious, compassionate, and have a lot of experience. (Unparallel adjective and verb usage)

Parallel: I am ambitious, compassionate, and experienced.

SCAN ME



For more information on transitions, see our [“Transitions” handout](#).

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For more information on transitions, see our [“Parallelism” handout](#).

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