



COHERENCE AND COHESION IN WRITING

Coherence refers to the logical organisation of your ideas through paragraphing and the logical sequencing of ideas within paragraphs.

Cohesion refers to the organisation of your language, which shows how your sentences are connected and related. These are criteria by which your writing tasks are assessed.

Coherence

A number of features make an essay coherent and thus flow smoothly. These features include the following:

- essay structure – paragraphing
- paragraph structure
- transition words and phrases

Essay Structure – Paragraphing

Your ideas need to be logically organised into paragraphs and structured, for example in the following manner:

Introductory Paragraph

- Topic
- Thesis Statement or Statement of Purpose

Body Paragraph 1

- Development of Main Idea presented in the Thesis Statement

Body Paragraph 2

- Development of Main Idea presented in the Thesis Statement

Concluding Paragraph

- Summary
- Recommendation

IELTS Tip

Organise your ideas into paragraphs and remember to connect each paragraph with the previous one.

Each paragraph should have a topic sentence, and supporting and developing sentences.

Use transition words or phrases to connect your ideas.

Paragraph Structure

Topic Sentence (TS)

Each paragraph should have **one idea** which is clearly expressed in a topic sentence. This idea is in support of the thesis statement of the essay presented in your introductory paragraph.

Supporting Sentences (SS)

These sentences support the topic sentence or the main idea of the paragraph.

Developing sentences (DS)

Developing sentences further develop the idea in the supporting sentence by providing an example, a reason or an explanation.

Here is a Writing Task 2 question topic and task.

IELTS Writing Task 2

The ageing populations of more developed countries are going to cause social and economic problems for society in the future, especially for the younger generation.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement.

Here is a sample introduction addressing the question.

Introduction

In the modern world today, people are expected to live longer because of better health care resources, the availability of better quality foods and the higher **standards of living. While the changing age structure of society might be problematic, it should not always be viewed as something threatening.**

The second sentence in the introductory paragraph gives the thesis statement. The two main arguments are as follows.

BP1	BP2
Agree	Disagree
the changing age structure of society might be problematic	it (the changing age structure of society) should not always be viewed as something threatening

These two arguments are developed in body paragraphs in the essay below. Each main idea is developed in a separate paragraph. The argument is developed logically and the ideas follow a sequence.

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Body Paragraph 1

There is no denying that constraints of time, money and space are placed on modern industrial societies with growing aged populations and declining birth rates. The most obvious would be the costs associated with caring for the elderly, funding their retirement pensions and providing residential care accommodation. Governments cannot be expected to carry this burden alone. They would need to impose additional taxes on the younger population and shift some of the caring responsibilities onto the extended families.

This body paragraph is agreeing with the topic. The first sentence in the paragraph – the topic sentence (TS) – states the topic and what the paragraph will be saying about the topic. The supporting (SS) and developing sentences (DS) explain the main idea.

The main idea is developed as follows:

	Sequencing of ideas	Development of main idea
TS	main or controlling idea - reasons	There is no denying that constraints of time, money and space are placed on modern industrial societies with growing aged populations and declining birth rates.
SS ₁	explanation	The most obvious would be the costs associated with caring for the elderly, funding their retirement pensions and providing residential care accommodation.
DS _{1.1}	statement (opinion)	Governments cannot be expected to carry this burden alone.
DS _{1.2}	justification (reason)	They would need to impose additional taxes on the younger population and shift some of the caring responsibilities onto the extended families.

Transition Words and Phrases

Transition words and phrases are used to link ideas between paragraphs and sentences.

Here are some of the more common transition words and phrases.

Type	Transition Words or Phrases
Addition	in addition, furthermore, moreover, also
Listing	first, first and foremost, firstly, second, secondly, the most important, the most obvious
Similarity	similarly, in the same way, likewise
Contrast	however, in contrast, on the other hand, on the contrary
Example	for example, for instance
Result	therefore, as a result, consequently, hence, thus, accordingly
Emphasis	indeed, in fact, above all
Conclusion	in conclusion, to conclude, in summary, to summarise, in short

The second body paragraph (BP2) presents arguments which support the opposite view. The relationship between the two paragraphs is shown using the contrasting transition phrase **on the other hand**.

Body Paragraph 2

On the other hand, the kinds of valuable contribution which healthy, mobile and enthusiastic retirees can make should not be underestimated. First and foremost, they carry a wealth of skills and work experience. Employers should look to take advantage of this and recruit or even retain mature age workers. Their expertise would be invaluable. Second, seniors being upwardly mobile tend to travel extensively, usually to discover their own country. This can only stimulate the economy. The revenue that would be generated for the hospitality industry by these “grey nomads”, as they are affectionately known, would be significant.

The ideas between sentences within the paragraph are connected using the following transition words and phrases.

	Type	Sentence
TS	contrast	On the other hand , the kinds of valuable contribution which healthy, mobile and enthusiastic retirees can make should not be underestimated.
SS ₁	listing	First and foremost , they carry a wealth of skills and work experience.
DS _{1.1}		Employers should look to take advantage of this and recruit or even retain mature age workers.
DS _{1.2}		Their expertise would be invaluable.
SS ₂	listing	Second , seniors being upwardly mobile tend to travel extensively, usually to discover their own country.
DS _{2.1}		This can only stimulate the economy.
DS _{2.2}		The revenue that would be generated for the hospitality industry by these “grey nomads”, as they are affectionately known, would be significant.

Cohesion

In addition to the use of transition words and phrases, cohesion can be achieved using the following language devices:

- reference words and agreement
- linking
- synonyms

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Reference Words and Agreement

Reference words point back or refer to words or phrases in previous sentences. They need to agree in number and person with the word or phrase they are replacing.

Here are some of the more common referents.

Language devices	Examples
pronouns	
personal, possessive	it, she, his, them, their
demonstrative	this, that, these, those
relative	who, which, that
definite article	the

Body paragraph 2 uses a variety of referents which are illustrated below.

Body Paragraph 2	
First reference	Later reference
On the other hand, the kinds of valuable contribution which healthy, mobile and enthusiastic retirees can make should not be underestimated. agreement: 3 rd person plural	First and foremost, they carry a wealth of skills and work experience.
First and foremost, they carry a wealth of skills and work experience .	Employers should look to take advantage of this and recruit or even retain mature age workers.
Employers should look to take advantage of this and recruit or even retain mature age workers . agreement: possessive plural	Their expertise would be invaluable.
Second, seniors being upwardly mobile tend to travel extensively , usually to discover their own country.	This can only stimulate the economy.
Second, seniors being upwardly mobile tend to travel extensively, usually to discover their own country.	The revenue that would be generated for the hospitality industry by these "grey nomads" , as they are affectionately known, would be significant.

Linking

Coordinating and subordinating conjunctions and other parts of speech link ideas within and between sentences.

Some of the more common conjunctions are on the following page:

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linking ideas	conjunctions		other parts of speech
	coordinating	subordinating	
equal ideas	and, both ... and		another, as well as
alternative ideas	or, either ... or		
contrasting ideas	but, yet	although, even though, though, while	despite, in spite of
reasons	for, so	because, as, since	as a result of, because of, due to
condition		if, provided that	
subordinating words			
referring to humans			who, whom
referring to nonhumans and things			which, that

Examples of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions in body paragraph 2 include:

- **linking equal ideas**

Employers **should look to take advantage** of this **and recruit** or even retain mature age workers.

- **linking alternative ideas**

Employers **should look to** take advantage of this **and recruit or** even **retain** mature age workers.

An example using **subordination** is:

On the other hand, the kinds of valuable contribution **which** healthy, mobile and enthusiastic retirees can make should not be underestimated.

Synonyms

Using synonyms avoids the repetition of key words and helps the reader to see how the sentences in a paragraph are linked.

In body paragraph 2, the following synonyms are used for **aged individuals**.

On the other hand, the kinds of valuable contribution which **healthy, mobile and enthusiastic retirees** can make should not be underestimated. First and foremost, they carry a wealth of skills and work experience. Employers should look to take advantage of this and recruit or even retain **mature age workers**. **Their expertise would be invaluable**. **Second, seniors being upwardly mobile** tend to travel extensively, usually to discover their own country. This can only stimulate the economy. The revenue that would be generated for the hospitality industry by these **“grey nomads”**, as they are affectionately known, would be significant.