

Lesson Plan: Cohesion and coherence in academic writing

Level	Advanced (C1–C2)
Time	60–90 minutes
Skills	Writing
Focus	Reference chains, lexical cohesion, connectives, topic sentences, paragraph structure

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand the difference between cohesion (how ideas link) and coherence (how ideas flow logically)
- Use reference devices — pronouns, synonyms, this/these — to create cohesive text
- Structure paragraphs with clear topic sentences and logical development
- Edit text for improved cohesion and coherence

TARGET LANGUAGE & EXAMPLES

Cohesion devices

1. Reference: pronouns (it, they, this, these) refer back to previous information
2. Lexical cohesion: synonyms and near-synonyms: rise → increase → growth
3. Ellipsis: omitting repeated elements: 'He applied and [he] was accepted.'
4. Connectives: however, therefore, in contrast, as a result

Coherence: logical paragraph structure

- Topic sentence: introduces the main idea of the paragraph
- Development: evidence, explanation, examples supporting the topic sentence
- Clincher/link: connects to next paragraph or concludes the point

Reference chains

- Introduce with a noun → use pronoun or synonym → avoid repeating the noun
- The company was founded in 2010. It started small but the firm has since grown.
- Warning: overuse of 'it' — check that each 'it' has a clear, unambiguous referent.

Meaning & Nuance

Cohesion problem	Example	Revised version
Unclear pronoun referent	The report and the data were analysed. It was flawed.	The report and the data were analysed. The report was found to be flawed.
Repetitive noun	The company increased revenue. The company hired staff.	The company increased revenue, hired new staff, and expanded significantly.
Missing connective	Sales rose. Costs fell. The company was profitable.	Sales rose and costs fell; consequently, the company returned to profit.
No topic sentence	[Data about X] [Data about Y] [Conclusion about Z]	Begin with a clear topic sentence that unites the paragraph's theme.

LESSON PROCEDURE

1. Warm-up: Coherent or not? (10 min)

Task: Two paragraphs: one well-constructed, one with cohesion and coherence problems.

- Students identify what's wrong with the second paragraph.

→ *Builds diagnostic awareness before teaching.*

2. Presentation (15 min)

Task: Cohesion devices: reference, lexical, ellipsis, connectives.

- Coherence: topic sentence is the foundation of a well-structured paragraph.
- Reference chains: introduce → develop with synonym → pronouns.

3. Editing task (20 min)

Task: Students edit a paragraph with multiple cohesion and coherence problems.

- Problems: unclear pronouns, no topic sentence, no connectives, repetitive nouns.
- Share edits — compare choices and discuss.

4. Write and analyse (30 min)

Task: Students write a 150-word paragraph then analyse it themselves.

- Underline topic sentence. Circle connectives. Trace reference chains.
- Peer review using a checklist: topic sentence? Connectives? Lexical variety? Clear pronouns?

TEACHER NOTES

- Coherence separates a C1 essay from a B2 essay in Cambridge and IELTS marking criteria.
- The reference chain concept (introduce → synonym → pronoun) is simple but transformative for writing quality.

EXTENSION / HOMEWORK

Choose one or more:

1. Analyse a paragraph from an academic article: identify the topic sentence, connectives, and reference devices.
2. Write a 150-word paragraph and annotate it showing your cohesion devices.
3. Edit a given paragraph to improve cohesion and coherence — explain each change you make.