

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF COHESIVE DEVICES
IN B1 WRITING OF NON-ENGLISH MAJORED JUNIORS
AT DONG A UNIVERSITY AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS**

Tran Thi Phuoc Trang^a, Nguyen Doan Viet Trinh^b

Abstract:

This study investigates the use of cohesive devices among third-year non-English major students at Dong A University, specifically in their B1 level writing. A survey involving 100 students was conducted to assess their frequency of use, opinions on five types of cohesive device, and the challenges they face in academic writing. The data collected was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. A total of 100 midterm essays were reviewed to validate the survey findings. To enhance the reliability and objectivity of the research, feedback from several experts, including B1 instructors, was gathered regarding the curriculum, students' usage of cohesive devices, and their accuracy in application. The results reveal a strong correlation between students' use of cohesive devices and the teaching methods employed by instructors. Despite the frequency of usage, students often encounter difficulties and make errors when utilizing these devices. Based on the findings, the study aims to provide practical recommendations and solutions from educators, along with academic research, to equip third-year non-English major students at Dong A University with effective techniques and skills for using linking words in their B1 level writing. Ultimately, the goal is to enhance the students' writing proficiency by improving their ability to use cohesive devices effectively.

Keywords: *B1 Writing, Non-English majored juniors, Dong A University, current status, challenges*

Introduction

Listening and reading are considered passive skills since learners only need to receive and comprehend the language, rather than create it. On the other hand, speaking and writing are termed active skills because they require learners to generate the language themselves (Ramadan, 2019). Recognizing the importance of writing skills in language learning, academic writing has been included in proficiency assessment examinations. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an international standard that describes language proficiency across six levels, level B1 corresponds to independent language users. Therefore, academic writings at this level ensure an accurate reflection of students' language proficiency upon graduation. Today, with the requirement of achieving a B1 level of proficiency upon

^a Dong A University; trangttp@donga.edu.vn; Da Nang city

^b Dong A University; trinh99786@donga.edu.vn; Da Nang city

graduation from universities in Vietnam, the urgent situation faced by most Vietnamese students, particularly third-year students who are not studying English as their major, is closely related to writing skills in academic assignments. Linking words have become one of the issues directly related to whether a B1 writing meets the required standards. Do juniors who are not majoring in English utilize cohesive devices in their writings? Based on the aforementioned reasons, the study aims to explore the current situation regarding the use of cohesive devices in B1 writings by non-English majored juniors and to propose some solutions for improvement through the research paper titled *"An Investigation into the Use of Cohesive Devices in B1 Writing of non-English majored Juniors at Dong A University and Suggested Solutions."*

This study aims to contribute to the development of strategies for learning and teaching English. Practically, the findings of this research support individuals interested in improving and developing writing skills at the B1 level. For students seeking to enhance their use of cohesive devices in B1 level writing or for teachers looking for effective teaching methods and plans for their students, this research is conducted to provide assistance, address inquiries, and offer the most suitable solutions for them.

Informants and research methodology

Informants

The study focused on surveying approximately 100 third-year students from three classes within the Faculty of Tourism at Dong A University. Furthermore, the researcher has gathered 11 completed survey questionnaires from B1 English teachers at Dong A University.

Research Methodology

To achieve the objectives, the researcher conducted the study using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Specifically, the survey focused on two primary groups: non-English and instructors teaching B1 level English classes. The quantitative method assisted the researcher in determining the current status of cohesive device usage in B1 level writing among students. Following this, a survey of B1 instructors was conducted to gather insights and solutions for improving the usage of cohesive devices by students. The qualitative research method involved examining how cohesive devices are utilized in 100 midterm exam papers (writing skills) to compile a list of linking words that students commonly use in their B1 level writing. The data analysis process consists of the following main steps (1) Analyzing the current state of cohesive devices used in B1 level writing by students; (2) Reviewing and identifying the total number of types of cohesive devices utilized; (3) Identifying effective methods to improve the use of cohesive devices specifically, and writing skills at the B1 level in general for students; and (4) Drawing conclusions and making recommendations.

Results and Discussion

Students' Current State of Cohesive Device Usage in their B1 Level Writing

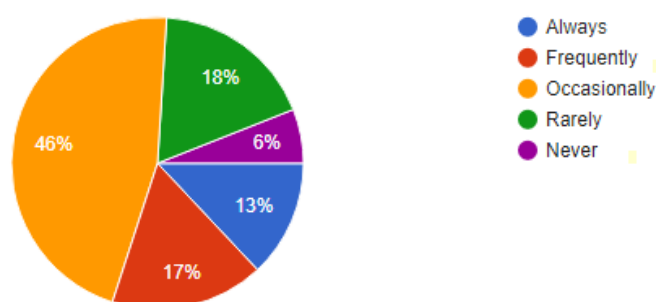


Figure 1. The frequency of cohesive device usage by students in B1 level writing

The pie chart demonstrates how often students utilize the cohesive devices in their B1 writing. Each segment of the chart represents the corresponding percentages that indicate how frequently students use them. It can be seen that the majority of students occasionally use cohesive devices in their writing, accounting for the highest percentage at 46%. This is followed by those who rarely use them, representing 18%, and those who frequently utilize these devices, making up 17%. The lowest results belong to those who always use cohesive devices and those who never use them, with collected figures of 13% and 6%, respectively.

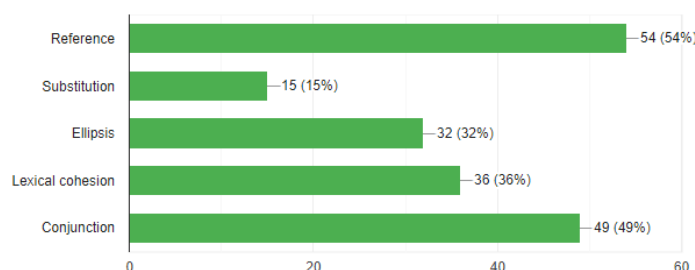


Figure 2. Types of cohesive devices used in B1-level student writing

The bar chart illustrates the proportion of different types of cohesive devices commonly used in B1-level student writing. Overall, the majority of students use reference transition words, which have the highest percentage, while substitution transitions account for the lowest percentage. Specifically, reference transitions are used to connect sentences and paragraphs in writing, making up 54%, followed by conjunctions, used by 49% of students. The remaining types, in descending order of usage, include lexical cohesion at 36%, ellipsis at 32%, and finally, substitution, with only 15%.

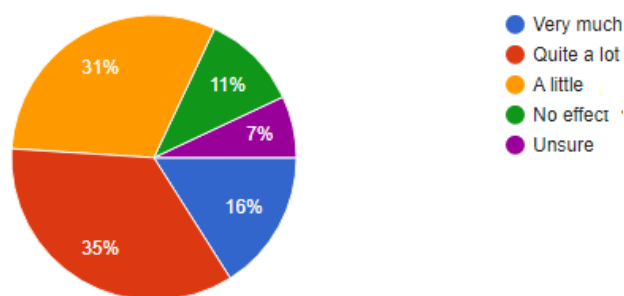


Figure 3. The impact of cohesive devices on scores in writing tests

The chart above illustrates the extent to which cohesive devices influence students' scores on written tests. The majority of students believe that cohesive devices play a significant role and have a considerable impact on their exams, accounting for 35%. Following this, 31% of respondents feel that cohesive devices have a slight influence. In contrast, only 16% believe that they greatly affect their writing. Meanwhile, 11% and 7% of the remaining participants think that cohesive devices have no impact and are uncertain about this issue, respectively.

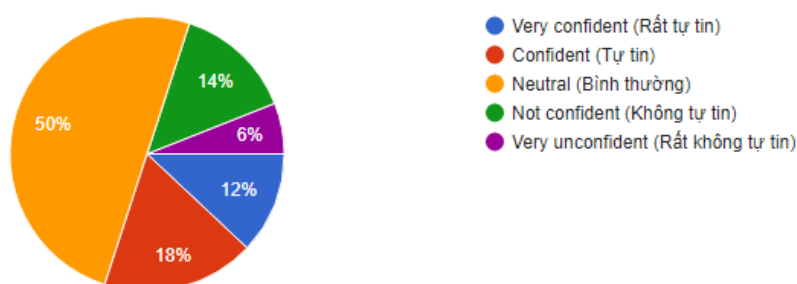


Figure 4. The level of confidence of students when using cohesive devices

Turning to the second chart, it illustrates the level of confidence among students when using linked devices in their writing. The highest percentage, at 50%, corresponds to those who feel indifferent, while 18% expressed confidence. Interestingly, the proportion of students who feel unconfident stands at 14%, which is notably higher than the 12% who feel very confident, and the 6% who feel very unconfident.

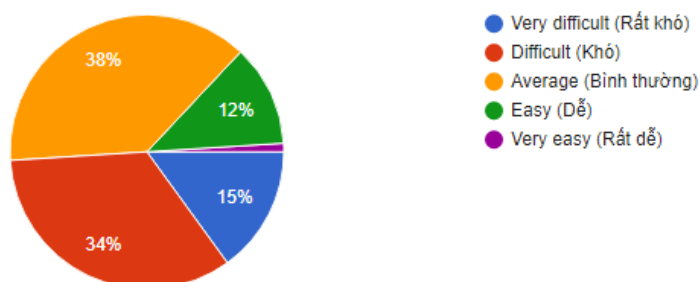


Figure 5. Level of difficulty from easy to hard for using cohesive devices in the writing test

The following chart provides information on how difficult students find it to use cohesive devices in their writing, ranked from easiest to most challenging. The 38% of respondents feel neutral about using cohesive devices, compared to 34% who find it difficult and 15% who consider it very difficult. In contrast, 12% find it easy, followed by only 1% who find it very easy.

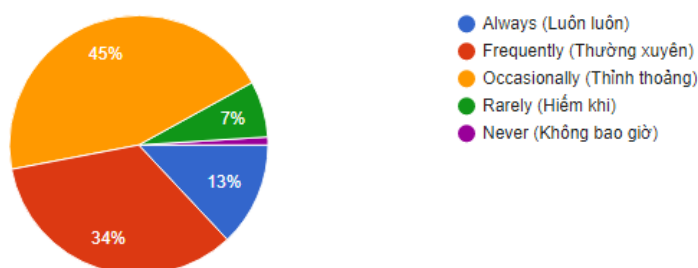


Figure 6. The frequency of errors in the use of cohesive devices in English tests, according to students' opinions

The pie chart above illustrates the frequency of errors students make when using cohesive devices in their English writing tests. Overall, the highest percentages belong to those who occasionally and frequently make mistakes. Specifically, 45% of students occasionally make errors, while 34% frequently do so. In comparison, 13% of students always make errors, whereas 7% rarely encounter difficulties, and only 1% never make mistakes.

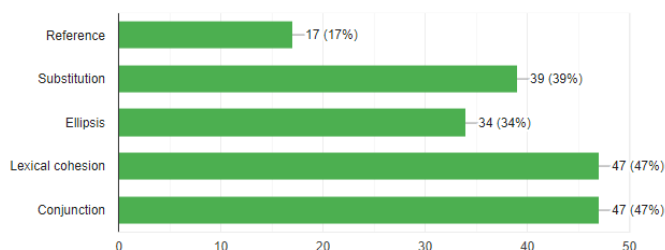


Figure 7. The types of cohesive devices that students commonly find challenging in their writing

The bar chart illustrates the percentage of cohesive devices that students frequently struggle with in writing. It is evident that lexical cohesion and conjunctions are the most challenging for students, with both categories accounting for 47%. Additionally, substitution and ellipsis pose fewer difficulties, with percentages of 39% and 34%, respectively. Ranked last among the five types of cohesive devices, reference accounts for only 17%, indicating that students tend to encounter fewer difficulties with this type compared to the others.

*The Frequency of Cohesive Devices in B1-Level Writings***Table 1. The frequency of cohesive devices in B1-level writings**

Cohesive Device	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Reference	100	29.41
Substitution	26	7.65
Ellipsis	20	5.88
Lexical Cohesion	44	12.94
Conjunction	150	44.12
Total	340	100

Based on an analysis of 100 students' essays, the table above shows the total occurrences of various cohesive devices. The first column outlines five distinct types of cohesive devices: reference, substitution, ellipsis, lexical cohesion, and conjunction.

Conjunctions are the most frequently used cohesive devices, appearing 150 times, accounting for 44.12%, indicating strong sentence and paragraph connectivity. Reference follows with 29.41%, demonstrating effective pronoun usage to avoid redundancy. Lexical cohesion accounts for 12.94% with 44 occurrences. Substitution and ellipsis appear less frequently, with 26 occurrences (7.65%) and 20 times (5.88%) respectively.

Evaluation of B1 Criteria Compliance

Writing for B1 Preliminary for Schools is assessed in terms of Content, Communicative Achievement, Organisation and Language. The detailed band descriptors are as follows:

Band	Content	Communicative Achievement	Organisation	Language
5	All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed.	Uses the conventions of the communicative task to hold the target reader's attention and communicate straightforward ideas.	Text is generally well organised and coherent, using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices.	Uses a range of everyday vocabulary appropriately, with occasional inappropriate use of less common lexis. Uses a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms with a good degree of control. Errors do not impede communication.
4	Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.			
3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is on the whole informed.	Uses the conventions of the communicative task in generally appropriate ways to communicate straightforward ideas.	Text is connected and coherent, using basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices.	Uses everyday vocabulary generally appropriately, while occasionally overusing certain lexis. Uses simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control. While errors are noticeable, meaning can still be determined.
2	Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.			

Table 2. Writing Assessment subscales for B1 Preliminary for Schools

Based on the collected student essays, the majority of students perform adequately in establishing a strong connection between ideas and sentences, but their performance is generally at a moderate level, achieving a band score of 3, as per the criteria in the table. Most essays meet the required level of sentence and paragraph coherence. However, some essays do not use cohesive devices, or use them incorrectly, resulting in disjointed sentences that lack clarity.

Teachers' Perspectives and Experiences on the Use of Cohesive Devices in Students' Writing

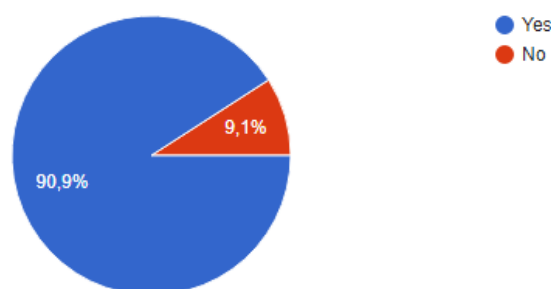


Figure 8. Teachers' attention to the use of cohesive devices in students' writing

Based on the chart above, it can be observed that most of the teachers pay attention to the use of cohesive devices in students' writing, with 90,9% responding 'yes' and only 9.1% indicating otherwise. This suggests that teachers have shown considerable attention to emphasizing the importance of cohesive devices in students' writing.

The Impact of Lack of Knowledge on Cohesive Devices on Students' Grades

The most significant impact of students' lack of knowledge about cohesive devices, as reported by all B1-level teachers, includes (1) A lack of coherence and cohesion; (2) Reduced ability to convey messages through sentences, paragraphs, and written texts; (3) Negative effects on linguistic accuracy, grammar, and task response; (4) Lower scores from the task section to the overall performance.

Students' Difficulties and Advantages of Using Cohesive Devices in B1 Writing

Many non-English majored students face challenges in using cohesive devices effectively in speaking and writing. They are not properly taught how to use them, often lacking knowledge of various cohesive devices and overusing a few. Teachers often lack time to address and correct these issues effectively, preventing students from improving their use of cohesive devices in their writing.

Using cohesive devices accurately offers several advantages for students. It enhances their writing by making it clearer, more coherent, and logical. When students master cohesive devices, they can improve the overall structure and flow of their writing, leading to better coherence and cohesion. As a result, their writing becomes more complex and well-organized, helping them achieve higher academic grades.

Common Mistakes Students Make in Using Cohesive Devices in English Writing

The most common mistake students make when using cohesive devices is the misuse and overuse of certain connectors. Many students struggle to understand the correct context for these devices, leading them to apply them incorrectly or too frequently.

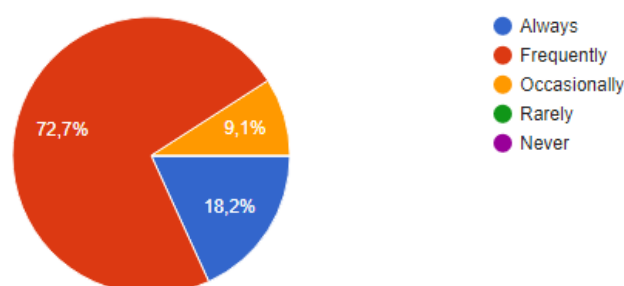
Solutions to Improve Students' Use of Cohesive Devices in B1-Level Writing**Students' Participation in Supplementary Activities**

Figure 9. Encouraging supplementary activities to enhance students' use of cohesive devices in writing

In the pie chart, the level of encouragement by teachers for students to participate in supplementary activities is represented across five categories. As many as 72.7% of participants selected "frequently," indicating that teachers strongly support this suggestion. Meanwhile, 18.2% chose "always," and 9.1% selected "occasionally," showing that all teachers support this initiative in enhancing students' writing skills.

Designing and Assigning Focused Writing Tasks

Designing and assigning tasks that require students to write paragraphs or essays that include cohesive devices. In such tasks, the emphases should be placed on the use of cohesive devices.

Practicing in Practical Contexts

Have students practice writing in specific, real-life contexts to enhance application. Use activities such as rewriting weak paragraphs to improve sentence connections.

Integrating Reading and Writing Skills

Encourage students to read model texts that effectively use cohesive devices. Ask students to create their own sentences or paragraphs based on learned phrases. Teach students to structure paragraphs clearly topic sentence, supporting details, and concluding sentence.

Sentence Combining and Practical Exercises

Use sentence-combining exercises to help students practice using cohesive devices flexibly. Start with simple texts and gradually progress to more complex ones.

Utilizing Technology and AI

Encourage the use of tools such as Grammarly or ChatGPT to check errors and improve cohesion. Allow students to write and then use AI tools for evaluation and feedback.

Enhancing Feedback and Collaboration

Students should receive feedback from teachers or peers to improve their use of cohesive devices. Regular writing practice accompanied by feedback will significantly enhance their skills.

Suggestions for Enhancing the Teaching and Learning of Cohesive Devices at the B1 Level

Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum Support for Teaching Cohesive Devices

According to several teachers, while students are introduced to common cohesive devices like conjunctions and sequencing words, the materials do not provide enough support to develop a deep understanding or effective application. As a result, students may struggle to remember and use these devices accurately in their writing. In general, the current curriculum provides only a foundational overview and does not offer consistent or comprehensive practice with cohesive devices.

Designing Writing Tasks with a Focus on Cohesive Devices

Classroom writing tasks should be specifically designed to help students recognize the importance of cohesive devices. Activities such as rewriting weak paragraphs, combining sentences, or composing longer texts using appropriate cohesive devices can help students practice applying them in context.

Clear Introduction and Contextual Teaching

Teachers should introduce cohesive devices in meaningful contexts. Providing a list of common cohesive devices along with clear examples and usage explanations helps students understand their functions. It is important to explain the purpose, meaning, and placement of these devices within sentences and paragraphs.

Guided Instruction and Structured Practice

Students benefit from guided writing practice that targets the use of cohesive devices. Activities such as gap-fill exercises, sentence rewriting, sentence connection, and model text analysis allow students to apply what they have learned. Teachers should also highlight and correct common errors to reinforce proper usage.

Analyzing and Learning from Model Texts

Reading model essays or paragraphs that effectively use cohesive devices can help students understand how coherence is achieved in writing. Comparing texts with and without cohesive devices allows students to clearly see the impact of cohesion on clarity and flow.

Increasing Practice Opportunities and Feedback

Frequent writing practice on various topics should be encouraged to help students become more comfortable using cohesive devices. Writing prompts can offer structured

opportunities for practice. In addition, feedback from teachers on how cohesive devices are used in students' writing is crucial for improvement.

Adjusting the Curriculum

The current curriculum should include more content and dedicated lessons on cohesive devices. Rather than limiting instruction to a few writing sessions, cohesive device instruction should be integrated across multiple lessons to reinforce understanding and application over time.

Suggested solutions

Self-assess and revise their own writing

According to "Writing in the Twenty-First Century" by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2010), self-assessment and revision are important in the development of students' writing skills. Many students focus mainly on the content, main ideas, and arguments of their writing after completing an assignment, often forgetting about the linking devices used in their work. This is why most students make basic mistakes with linking words in their writing. The less attention students pay to evaluating and revising the linking words in their essays, the less coherent their writing becomes, leading to confusion and disconnection that makes it difficult to convey their message to readers, ultimately affecting their writing scores.

The steps for self-assessment and revision are as follows.

1. Review all the cohesive devices used in your writing.
2. List any cohesive devices that are used incorrectly or are unclear in a separate group.
3. Evaluate whether those cohesive devices fit the sentences, paragraphs, and the message they convey to the reader.
4. Look up the cohesive devices in the group of incorrect or unclear ones (if possible).
5. Find alternative or more appropriate cohesive devices for the sentences and paragraphs.
6. Revise your writing to make it complete.

Receive feedback and revise their own writing from the teacher

Feedback from teachers plays a crucial role in improving students' writing skills, especially in the use of linking words. Dana R. Ferris's study "Responding to Student Writing" (2003) shows that feedback from instructors not only helps students become more aware of their writing skills but also aids them in improving their use of linking words in their essays.

Ferris emphasizes that providing effective feedback is essential for students to better understand the areas they need to improve in their writing. The diverse feedback methods used by instructors can guide students in identifying and correcting mistakes related to linking words, helping them develop a more coherent and logical writing style.

In summary, teacher feedback is a key factor in developing students' writing skills, particularly in effectively using linking words, which contributes to creating higher-quality and more understandable essays.

Learn and practice through online academic writing courses

Coursera – A Global Leader in Online Learning

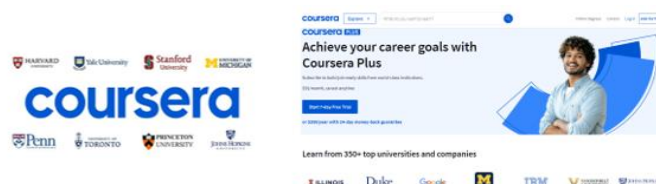


Figure 11. Coursera

Coursera is not only popular among individual learners but is also a preferred solution for many leading enterprises. As of 2019, Coursera for Business reported an annual growth of 100% in client acquisition, collaborating with major corporations such as Mastercard, Adobe, Southwest Airlines, and over 60 other Fortune 500 companies. In an era where 90% of companies utilize e-learning, Coursera is emerging as a frontrunner in the corporate online training sector.

Despite these minor limitations, Coursera excels in offering academic content from top-tier institutions such as Princeton, Sciences Po, and UNAM, as well as from leading companies like Google, IBM, and Autodesk. These courses often focus on practical, career-oriented skills. While the platform's interface could benefit from some upgrades, it remains intuitive and user-friendly.

Therefore, Coursera courses are widely regarded as highly reputable and reliable. Accordingly, several academic writing courses aimed at improving the use of transition words in writing can be highlighted as follows.

Academic English: Writing Specialization

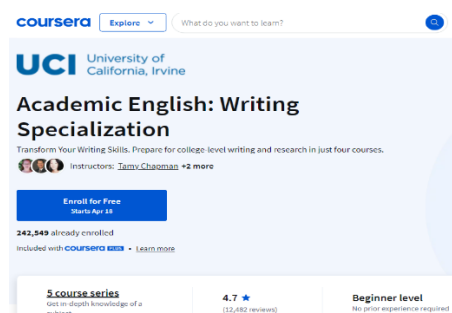


Figure 11. Academic English: Writing Specialization

Joining the “Academic English: Writing Specialization” course at the University of California, Irvine, is a great opportunity to improve writing skills in general and the use of linking words in particular.

The course “Academic English: Writing Specialization” available on Coursera ensures a high level of credibility, as it is offered in collaboration between Coursera and the University of California, Irvine (UCI).

The Academic English: Writing Specialization explicitly supports the development of transitional language and cohesive writing throughout its core courses. These aspects are particularly emphasized in the following areas.

(1) Getting Started with Essay Writing

In this course, learners focus on constructing well-developed body paragraphs, which play a crucial role in ensuring the logical flow of ideas. To create coherent paragraphs, students are guided to use transitional words and phrases effectively, connecting sentences and ideas in a clear and logical manner.

(2) Advanced Writing

The advanced course places strong emphasis on integrating and connecting ideas from multiple sources, which requires a high level of clarity and cohesion. Students are taught to construct logical and well-connected arguments — a skill that inherently involves the proficient use of transitional expressions and structural connectors across sentences and paragraphs.

Writing in English at University

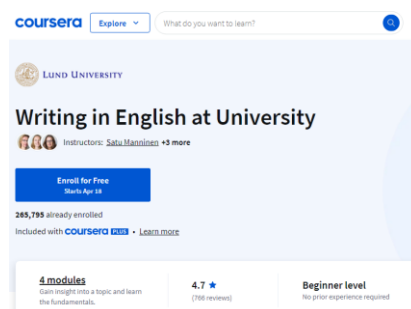


Figure 12. Writing in English at University by Lund University

The course is designed and taught by faculty members from Lund University, ensuring high academic standards and instructional quality.

The course "Writing in English at University" demonstrates a clear emphasis on the use of transitions and the development of coherence and cohesion in academic writing. These essential writing components are systematically addressed through several core modules within the course.

Module 2 – Structuring Your Text and Presenting Your Argument

This module places the strongest focus on achieving clarity and cohesion in writing. Learners are guided on how to build the structure of an academic text in a clear

and logical manner – directly reinforcing the concept of coherence. It also provides instruction on organizing information within paragraphs and larger sections, including the strategic use of transitional words and phrases to ensure logical flow.

Module 3 – Using Sources in Academic Writing

While this module does not focus explicitly on transitions, it addresses the important skill of connecting personal arguments with secondary sources. Learners are taught how to position their stance and integrate ideas from multiple sources in a coherent way, which inherently involves the use of transitions and logical connectors. These techniques are essential for maintaining cohesion and presenting a unified academic argument across different textual references.

Module 4 – The Writing Process and Finalizing Your Text

In this module, students explore various strategies for editing, proofreading, and enhancing writing style. Emphasis is placed on ensuring consistency in both structure and meaning, which includes the proper application of transitional devices and cohesive phrases to prevent fragmented writing. Moreover, learners are guided on refining tone, style, and overall coherence, thus improving the fluency and effectiveness of their writing at both the sentence and paragraph levels.

English Composition I

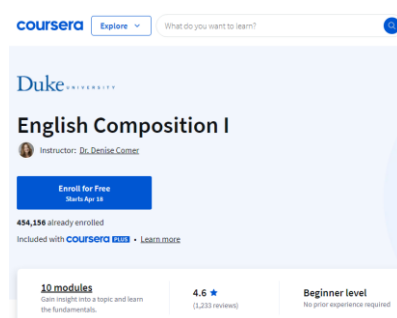


Figure 13. English Composition I by Duke University

The “English Composition I” course offered by Duke University on the Coursera platform consists of ten well-structured modules designed to help learners develop comprehensive academic writing skills in English. Under the guidance of Dr. Denise Comer, the course has attracted over 454,000 learners and has received high praise, with an average rating of 4.6 out of 5 from more than 1,200 reviews.

Among its ten modules, particular emphasis is placed on the use of transitional devices and text organization, especially in Module 6: Writing Cohesively and Case Study Revision. In this module, learners are guided to improve the coherence of their writing by revising their case study project based on instructor feedback, ensuring clear and logical connections between ideas.

Through the gradual development of writing tasks from Module 1 to Module 10, students not only practice using transitional phrases effectively but also refine their

overall writing abilities. This structured approach provides a more systematic and efficient alternative to self-study, enabling learners to apply transitions purposefully and enhance the clarity and flow of their academic writing.

Learn and apply theories from academic writing textbooks

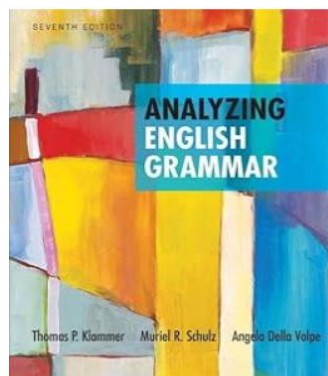


Figure 14. Analyzing English Grammar

“Analyzing English Grammar” by Thomas P. Klammer, Muriel R. Schulz, and Angela Della Volpe is an advanced grammar resource, highly regarded in the fields of linguistics and English language teaching.

The chapters are well-organized, with Chapter 6 standing out for its focus on conjunctions, which play a crucial role in creating coherence and connection between different parts of a text. Additionally, Chapters 10 and 11 delve into the use of subordinate clauses (adverbial, adjectival, and nominal clauses) to clarify meaning and enhance sentence cohesion.

One reason this book is highly regarded is its systematic and clear approach, which makes complex grammatical concepts more accessible for students and teachers. The book is suitable for both academic and teaching purposes, particularly in courses on English grammar, TESOL, and teacher training.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study focuses on the current situation of third-year non-language major students in using cohesive devices in B1-level writing. The researcher gathered feedback from 100 students and 11 teachers to collect opinions, data, and information, as well as to identify appropriate methods for the research. After receiving responses from both groups through surveys, the researcher was able to assess the authenticity and accuracy of the answers, gaining a clearer and more confident understanding of the current state of cohesive device usage in students' writing. Based on this, the researcher presents several measures to improve the effective use of cohesive devices in writing and aims to help students achieve higher scores in the B1 writing assessment.

Researchers may consider increasing the sample size and employing random sampling methods or other sampling techniques. Firstly, a larger sample size can provide

researchers with more comprehensive, multidimensional, and diverse feedback. A larger sample correlates with a higher degree of accuracy when compared to the total population, thereby ensuring greater authenticity in the research findings. Secondly, the use of random sampling or alternative sampling methods will compel the surveyed groups to yield results that the researcher cannot predict beforehand. This approach incorporates various factors, and the selection of a random sample can contribute to a diversity of responses. From a holistic perspective, researchers will have access to a wider array of data, leading to potential modifications in the methodologies employed. Concurrently, the study will also enhance the effectiveness of improvement strategies tailored for subjects from diverse backgrounds, including differing knowledge, experience, cultural contexts, and circumstances.

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