

Lesson 5.2

The Logical Flow of Ideas

If you had a written record of your thoughts, they might not seem connected. That's because your mind can jump around (in time too short to measure) from breakfast to the math exam to an upcoming weekend adventure. Until you share those thoughts—aloud or on paper—you don't need to connect them because you're the only one who has to understand them. Readers, however, depend on connections. They count on writing to be logical. That means that each sentence seems to flow right out of the preceding one and set up the one to follow. Sometimes logical connections are made with transitions (however, next, all the same, on the other hand), sometimes with pronouns (he, she, it, this, that), and sometimes with an example or explanation. In this lesson, we'll look at ways of making the flow logical.

Sharing an Example: *Dracula*

Following is a slightly revised passage from the classic horror novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. In this passage, Jonathan Harker is a guest in the castle of the eccentric Count Dracula. He is shaving one morning when he has a visit from his host. We have altered the writing a bit (with apologies to the author), removing transitional clues that show how ideas connect. Read the passage aloud, softly, inserting a question mark each time you find it difficult to make a connection.

“Good morning.”

I had not seen him. The reflection of the mirror covered the whole room behind me. I cut myself shaving. I turned to the glass.

The *man* was there. I could see him over *my* shoulder. There was no reflection.

I saw the *cut* bleed. I laid down the *razor*. The *Count's* eyes blazed with *fury*. He grabbed. I drew away. His hand touched the beads of the *crucifix*. There was a change. I could hardly believe *my* eyes.

Reflection

How did this passage sound as you read it aloud? Did it have a natural flow? Could you identify the main idea, or did you have to work hard to make the connections?

The author's main idea is _____

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- It was very simple to make connections. Each sentence led right into the next.
 - It was challenging to make connections. I had to try hard to figure things out.
 - It was impossible to make connections. Nothing went with anything else.

The Original (Thankfully!)

Here's the passage as Bram Stoker wrote it. The examples and explanations that give the piece its logical flow have been restored. Read this version aloud and share your thoughts.

"Good morning."

I started, for it *amazed me* that I had not seen him, since the reflection of the *mirror* covered the whole room behind *me*. In starting I had cut *myself*, but did not notice it at the *moment*.

Having answered the Count's salutation, I turned to the glass again to see how I had been mistaken. This time there could be no error, for the man was close to me, and I could see him over my shoulder. But there was no reflection of him in the mirror!

I saw that the cut had bled a little, and the blood was trickling over my chin. I laid down the razor, turning as I did so half-round. When the Count saw the blood, his eyes blazed with a sort of fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat. I drew away, and his hand touched the string of beads around my neck which held the crucifix. It made an instant change in him, for the fury passed so quickly that I could hardly believe that it was ever there.

Dracula
by Bram Stoker

Reflection

How did the author's original passage sound as you read it aloud? Did it have an easy and logical flow? Do you have a different sense, at this point, of the writer's main idea? Share your thoughts here.

I would describe the author's main message this way:

This time around,

- I understood the piece much better.
- I still had to try hard to figure things out.
- I still couldn't make sense of the message.

Restoring the Connection

Following are three sets of disconnected sentences. Try to figure out how they connect logically, then rewrite them to make that connection clear. There are no right answers. It's fine to combine or expand sentences. Use transitional words, explanations, or any other connections you wish. Your logical solution may require one sentence or more.

Example 1

Fallen leaves have clogged the city's drainage system. The forecast calls for rain.

Example 2

Boris felt no one liked him. He practiced dancing in his room.

Example 3

Aquarium hobbyists are crazy about seahorses. Seahorses rarely survive in captivity. Seahorses are a threatened species.

Share and Compare

Meet with a partner from your writing circle and share your revisions. Did you follow the same logical paths? If not, that's fine, so long as each solution makes sense. There's always more than one way to build connections.

A Bigger Task

As you have seen, building connections is primarily a matter of figuring out the main message. After practicing with small sentence sets, you're ready to build logic into a larger message, this time on forest fires. Read the following piece aloud carefully, with a pen or pencil in hand. Use any of the following strategies to improve the fluency and logical flow.

- Add transitional words or phrases
- Use pronouns carefully
- Change wording
- Combine sentences
- Add examples or explanations

It's that time of year. Smoke fills the sky. Wildfires dominate the local TV news. Young men and women are at the airport. Volunteers are joining hotshot crews. Hot shots fight fires on the front lines. Yesterday, seven fires were burning. Crews have been fighting the fires for many weeks. Helicopters use huge buckets used to dump water on the worst spots. Helicopters have been seen in the sky. Some crews are now returning. They will get some rest.

Share and Compare

Before sharing, read your revision aloud, softly, one more time. What is the main message? Does the logical flow make that message clear?

When you're ready, meet with your writing circle to share your revisions aloud. Listen carefully to each version. Are they different? Choose one to share with the whole class.

Letting Your Logical Thinking Show

For the final step in this lesson, you'll write and revise a short passage, making sure it has both (1) variety and (2) a logical flow to make the message clear.

Step 1: Begin by choosing a topic—something you know well and can write about confidently. It's much easier to think logically when you know your topic! Choose something that's on your mind right now, or use our list to help you think of an idea.

★ My topic _____

- Why music and art should be part of our curriculum
- Easy ways for kids to go green
- A film everyone should see (or book everyone should read)
- The best thing about our neighborhood

Step 2: Take five minutes for prewriting. You might complete any of the following.

- Make a sketch
- List readers' questions
- List details
- Make a word web

OR do anything that puts your thinking in motion.

Step 3: Write nonstop for 15 minutes. Go back once or twice to reread what you have written, asking yourself, “Does it make sense? Does each sentence flow naturally out of the one before?”

Share and Revise

Read your passage one last time prior to sharing, and make any quick revisions you feel are needed. Then share your passage in a writing circle. Have listeners share any questions they have about how ideas connect. Write those questions down so you can recall them later if you revise.



A Writer's Questions

As you know, setting your writing aside for a day or more can make a big difference in revision. Do you think it could help you discover gaps in logic? Try it with the draft you wrote for this lesson. Set it aside for three days. Then look again. Does it look just the way you remembered it? Can you revise with more confidence and power after not seeing it for a while?



Putting It to the Test

On-demand essays frequently receive low scores simply because the readers cannot see how ideas connect. What can you do to make sure this doesn't happen with your writing?