



Academic writing skills development

Telling the story of your research



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Introduction

Introduce yourself to the group and focus on the following:

- Your name and background (studies, work experience, etc.)
- Your expectations of this day, in particular, and the workshop series in general
- Your broad research idea / topic

Stories



Stories (cont)

Now, tell the same story to ...

- *An Eskimo*
- *Julius Malema*



Stories (cont)

Little Red Riding Hood: Yet another version

1ce bitd da was a slrk aka Little Red Riding Hood. LRRH lived with her m and d in a house next to the woods. Aih her gm also lived da, but otos of the woods.

One day LRRH's m said to her: "Gm is ck, nteohd, lonely and dl. I packed some of her fav snacks in this basket. Pls take this to her. Bg, and get to gm asap. And crb, ddas."

"Gr8, gm is kewl! It would be nice to see her."

Her m said: "Ayk da r bad guys out d and ynk b4yki u can get into trouble."

"OK, ihu, m. Bbs, bbfn!"

"GI!"

The elements of a story

- Characters
- Events
- Plot
- Setting / context
- Time

The functions of a story

- 31 different functions
 - Chronological
 - Logical
 - Causal
 - ...

The opening formula of a story

- Introduction
- Background
- Problem
- ...

In two minutes, tell your classmate(s) the story of your research and ensure that you use the opening formula of a story.



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Using keywords



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Keywords: Introduction

- Action
 - Indicate how you intend to approach the task
 - Examples ...
- Topic
 - Indicate what topic or theme will be covered
 - Examples ...
- Scope
 - Indicate the scope and limits of your topic
 - Examples ...

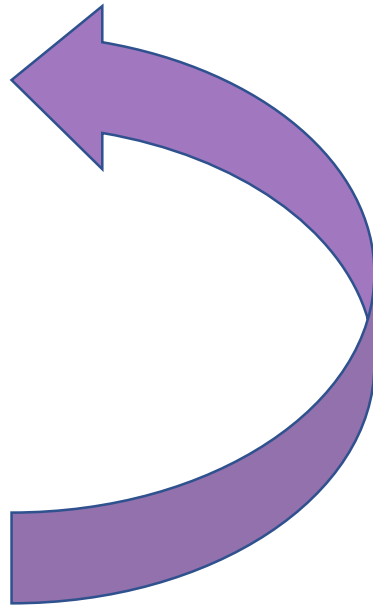
Keywords: A practical session

Again, tell the class the story of your research using the opening formula. Now ensure that you also include keywords:

- Action
- Topic
- Scope

AND, don't forget

- Characters
- Events
- Setting / context
- Time



Keywords: A practical session (cont)

“In this dissertation the sustainability of black economic empowerment will be discussed by tracking the success rate of four manufacturing enterprises from 2005-2012.”

From stories and keywords to literature reviews and academic arguments

In your written work you should always try to **construct sound arguments**. Unsound arguments will attract poor grades from assessors. In many cases the process of assessment involves **taking information and assembling, synthesising and re-arranging it into new patterns** that both form sound arguments and solve the problems set in assignments titles and examination questions.

Reflection: Back to the drawing board?

Which keywords (topic, scope/range and action keywords) did you include in your title? And, did you further develop them in your literature review / theoretical framework?

Did you use the opening formula?

What is the function of your story?

Did you include all the elements of a story?



Reading (and writing) with a strategy



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Reading with a strategy

What do you understand with
“Reading with a strategy”?

Reading with a strategy: Pre-reading (extra textual information)

- Author
- Title & sub-title
- Keywords
- Abstract

Reading with a strategy: Reading the abstract

- Problem
- Thesis
- Data / Proof / Evidence
- Conclusion

Where will we find these aspects in the article?

Reading with a strategy: Reading the abstract from another angle

- Purpose
- Design / Methodology / Approach
- Findings
- Practical implications
- Value

Reading with a strategy: Reading the introduction

NOTHING MUST COME AS A SURPRISE!

- Background / Contextualization
- Problem statement
- Map
- Thesis statement
- Your point of view

Reading with a strategy: Reading the conclusion

- Summary of the main part of the text
- Deductions made on the basis of the main body
- Personal opinion on what has been discussed
- Statement about limitations of the work
- Implications for future research

Reading with a strategy: Reading the main points of a text

- Main information / main parts
 - Introduction
 - Body
 - Conclusion
- Argumentation
 - Chronological
 - Logical
 - Causal
- Examples in support of the thesis

Reading with a strategy:

Colour coding when reading (a practical session)

- Use of the Viviers and Calof (1999) article
- Use different highlighters and draw attention to the following:
 - The problem and thesis statements (one colour)
 - Main ideas (another colour)
 - Supporting detail (yet another colour)
 - Important sources that needs further investigation
- Now link different parts of the text, preferably with a red / blue / green pen
 - Circle the linking words
 - Is there a chronological, a logical or a causal order?
- Lastly, annotate the text on the side and use keywords (action, topic, scope) with another colour pen
- Can you tell the story of this article?

Reading with a strategy: Creating structure by summarizing in tabular format

Bibliographical information	Problem statement	Argument / Data	Conclusion
Brody, R. 2010. From white-collar crime to red-collar crime. <i>Journal of Financial Crime</i> , 17(3):351-364.	It seems that violence is often involved in white-collar crimes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. W-C-C is not by definition violent2. Evolution: from W-C-C to R-C-C3. R-C-Cs – characteristics and case studies	W-C-Cs display violent tendencies; often result in dangerous R-C-Cs. Greater awareness can protect fraud examiners from becoming victims.



Writing (and reading) with a strategy

Argument structure



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Writing with a strategy: Different perspectives / view points



Writing with a strategy:

The argument - from introduction to conclusion

- Introductory part / rationale / context / background
- Problem statement
- Thesis statement
- Evidence
 - Quoting and paraphrasing
 - Summarising
 - Using data (Statistics, charts, graphs, illustrations, photos)
 - Data used without making inferences
 - Data interpreted within context of the text and used to come to conclusions
 - Using warrants
 - Additional support
 - Refutations / Rebuttals; Reservations; Qualifications
- Work towards a conclusion
- Linking to problem statement / abstract / introduction
- Coherence & cohesion

Writing with a strategy:

Introductory part / rationale / context / background

The introductory part / rationale / context / background should be presented in such a way that it points towards the approach that will be taken, or the direction that the argument will take.

Writing with a strategy:

Introductory part / rationale / context / background

Over the past twenty years, since South Africa embraced democracy, issues of intercultural communication have become more and more prominent in the workplace. However, very little research has been done to indicate if multicultural relations in the public service sector have improved and if managers have the necessary training or knowledge to deal with problems related to cultural differences.

Writing with a strategy: The problem statement

A problem statement is a description of a difficulty or lack that has to be solved or researched to find a solution. It can also be described as the gap between the real and the ideal situation or between principle and practice.

Writing with a strategy: The (complete) problem statement

/1/In order to accomplish their mission the South African public service needs a motivated workforce. /2/There are however frequent and severe disciplinary actions, absenteeism as well as various forms of unrests in the public sector which affect the accomplishment of the set mission. Preliminary investigation reveals that both non-management and management staff are not adequately motivated. /3/Without effective motivational packages and procedures the said vices are likely to continue and retard the achievement of the public sector's mission. /4/Need arises to examine the motivation systems and procedures of the South African public service, hence this proposed research.

Writing with a strategy: The thesis statement

The thesis explicitly states the focus and intention (point and purpose) of the writing and foreshadows the conclusion. It offers a way in which the subject matter will be interpreted by answering an explicit or implicit research question. In some instances it makes a claim and presents the argument that will form the body of the writing.

Writing with a strategy: The thesis statement

Based on structured interviews with staff members in six different public services departments, this report examines three problem areas, and shows that many problems arise where both qualified and unqualified workers are expected to do the same work, where lack of awareness of cultural differences occur and where some workers are not able to understand spoken English.

Although it is generally accepted that computers are a way of saving time, research undertaken in 2012, involving first year students in the Faculty of Economics at the NWU, points to the fact that many students **actually** regard the fact that assignments have to be handed in electronically, as more labour intensive than writing them by hand.

Writing with a strategy: Using evidence

Evidence in the form of relevant data is needed to support, to test or to refine a claim/thesis, or even to testify to the truth of a statement.

- Facts
- Statistics
- Scholarly verdicts

Writing with a strategy:

Using evidence – quoting, paraphrasing and summarising

- **Quoting verbatim:**

Middleton (2013:3) warned that, due to the global financial crisis "South Africa may slip into perennial malaise, continued tepid growth ... and it may continue to result in underperformance".

- **Paraphrasing a part of another text:**

Middleton (2013:5) claims that South Africa's economy had grown at an average rate of 2.1% in the past two years and that this fact was disconcerting for further financial growth and job creation.

- **Summarising part of another text:**

The overarching concern of Middleton's report was that slow growth might be reversed only in 2016 or 2017 when the country was assured a stable electricity supply (Middleton, 2013).

- **Using statistics, charts, graphs, illustrations, photos**

Writing with a strategy:

Using evidence – Statistics, charts, graphs, illustrations, photos

An exercise

- “The Consumer Protection Act places the burden of proof squarely on the shoulders of the supplier and not, as in the past, on the consumer.” (Levenstein, ...)
- Smith (...) argues that “[f]oreign suppliers need to be aware of the fact that their assets in South Africa could be forfeited to pay a damages order.”

Writing with a strategy: Integrating sources

Using data without drawing inferences from facts

Dickson (1984: 12) maintains that television violence has a marked effect on the development of the child. Brown (1985: 176) says that children who watch a great deal of televised violence could be affected for many years. The Television Broadcasting Tribunal (1982: 16) recommends that we should "limit the number of hours per week of programmes showing violence during children's viewing times".

Writing with a strategy: Integrating sources

- Using data interpreted within context of the text, and used to come to conclusions

That television violence has a considerable effect on the development of the child is not disputed. Both Dickson (1984: 12) and Brown (1985: 176) have shown through extensive experiments that the majority of children are affected by television violence, Brown having extended the base of her research to longitudinal studies which reveal that this effect is quite long-term. In the face of such convincing evidence, the Television Broadcasting Tribunal has been compelled to act in order to reduce the impact that increased television viewing could have on children. The Tribunal has recommended (1982: 16) that the number of hours per week of violent programmes should be limited during children's viewing times. In spite of these recommendations, however, there continues to be a significant level of violence in programmes which are broadcast at prime viewing times for children.

Writing with a strategy: Using warrants

The warrant is the explanation why or how the data supports the claim. It is the reasoning process which links the claim to the data in order to reach a conclusion. The warrant functions as a bridge between the data and the claim.

Writing with a strategy: Using warrants

- **Claim:** Abortions should be illegal

Why do you say so?

- **Data:** Abortion is murder.

How do you reach this conclusion?

- **Warrant:** Murder is the killing of one human by another – abortion is taking the life of another human being.

(This step is often left implicit, depending on the reader audience.)

Which other evidence can you supply to prove your statement? / How do you know that the foetus is a human being?

- **Support:** Medical scientists have proved beyond doubt that life starts at conception; therefore the foetus is a human being. Also: a foetus has the same DNA than a human being and thus it is a human being.

Writing with a strategy: Using warrants

Claim: Hybrid cars are an effective strategy to fight pollution.

Data: Hybrid cars combine a gasoline engine with a battery-powered electric motor.

Warrant: This combination of technologies means that less pollution is produced. According to ineedtoknow.org "the hybrid engine of the Prius, made by Toyota, produces 90 per cent fewer harmful emissions than a comparable gasoline engine."

Writing with a strategy: Additional support

The soundness of an argument depends on the degree in which the warrant, which connects the data with the claim, is made acceptable by proper backing.

Writing with a strategy: Additional support

Ample medical evidence suggests that marijuana is less dangerous than alcohol. A recent study by economists D. Mark Anderson and Daniel I. Rees found that semi-legalization, in the form of medical marijuana, in 16 states led adults to consume more marijuana but to moderate their alcohol consumption, leading to a 9 per cent decrease in traffic fatalities. Marijuana has not been found to be physically addictive, and addiction rates of any kind are lower for marijuana than for alcohol, tobacco and harder drugs.

Writing with a strategy: Refutations / Rebuttals

A statement that seeks to undermine, counter or weaken opposing claims against the main arguments by proving that they are unacceptable or insignificant, is called a refutation or a rebuttal.

Writing with a strategy:

Refutations / Rebuttals – Changing the thesis statement

Thesis/Claim: Abortions should be abrogated, because abortion is murder.

Counter argument: Feminists believe that even if the foetus has (human) rights, the rights of the mother are more important. A mother should have the right to decide if she wants a child and if she is able to care for it.

Conclusion: Abortion is killing a person and that is against the law – having rights does not change the facts. *Abortion should be abrogated.*

Writing with a strategy: Reservations – Limiting conditions

Limiting conditions applying to the thesis OR exceptions to a claim

Thesis/Claim: Abortions should be abrogated, because abortion is murder.

Counter argument: If the life of the mother is at risk, her rights should take preference and the foetus be aborted.

Conclusion: Abortions should be against the law, *except in cases where the life of the mother is at risk.*

Writing with a strategy: Qualifications – Specification of limits

Specification of limits to claim, warrant and backing OR
statement in which the degree of conditionality is
asserted

Thesis/Claim: Abortions should be abrogated, because
abortion is murder.

Counter argument: If the life of the mother is at risk, her
rights should take preference and the foetus be aborted.

Conclusion: *In most cases* abortions should be against the
law.

Writing with a strategy: Conclusions

A conclusion is a claim that has been reached by a process of reasoning.

- Restatement of the problem
- Summary of the main parts of the text / Main argument
- Conclusion reached through the above mentioned argument and suggested by the thesis statement at the beginning of the text

Writing with a strategy:

Conclusions

/1/Most Americans eat at fast-food establishments more than once a week, and many researchers agree that such eating habits are the leading (if not primary) cause of obesity in the U.S. /2/Obesity-related diseases such as diabetes and hypertension burden our healthcare system by billions of dollars each year. Whether through healthcare-insurance premiums or state and federal taxes, you suffer the consequences even if you eat only healthful, home-cooked meals. /3/Therefore, we should impose a small tax on every high-calorie meal served at fast-food chains in this country. This would not only offset obesity-related healthcare costs, but force consumers to seek out more healthful options when looking for lunch.

Writing with a strategy: Linking the conclusion with the problem statement / abstract

- /1/Despite his considerable influence on the development of English for Specific Purposes and all our professional lives, /2/almost nothing has been written about John Swales' distinctive prose style. Based on a 340 000 word corpus comprising 14 single-authored papers and most chapters from his three main books, /3/this paper sets out to identify the main features of his style. Using frequency, keyword and concordance analyses, I compare the Swales' corpus with a broader applied linguistics corpus of 710 000 words and /4/identify self mention, hedging and attitude, reader engagement and considerateness as characteristics of Swalesian rhetoric. /5/I conclude with the view that this is a disciplinary voice informed by a keen assessment of his readers and representing an independent creativity shaped by an accountability to shared practices.

Writing with a strategy: Linking the conclusion with the introduction

/1/Though nowadays it is more often claimed that humanity can develop without causing damage to nature ,/2/ there still exists strong opposing arguments to this hypothesis.

/3/Development assumes economic growth, and economic growth is impossible without industry, which needs energy resources.

/4/Currently, the range of goods required by common people has expanded significantly compared to the times before modern industrial technology was employed on a mass scale. /5/People feel the need, not only for primary essentials, such as a piece of bread and a roof over their heads, but also for various facilities and luxuries. /6/Providing humanity with these objects involves the exploitation of natural resources. /7/In turn, the conventional sources of energy we use today cause pollution, /8/so economic growth is almost inevitably associated with environmental damage.

Writing with a strategy:
The most important matter – Know when to stop!





Coherence and cohesion

An integrated whole



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Readability / Reading ease

What can we do to enhance readability / reading ease of our text?

- Level (style, register, formality, syntax, grammar, etc.)
- Signposting (guiding your reader)



Readability / Reading ease – An exercise

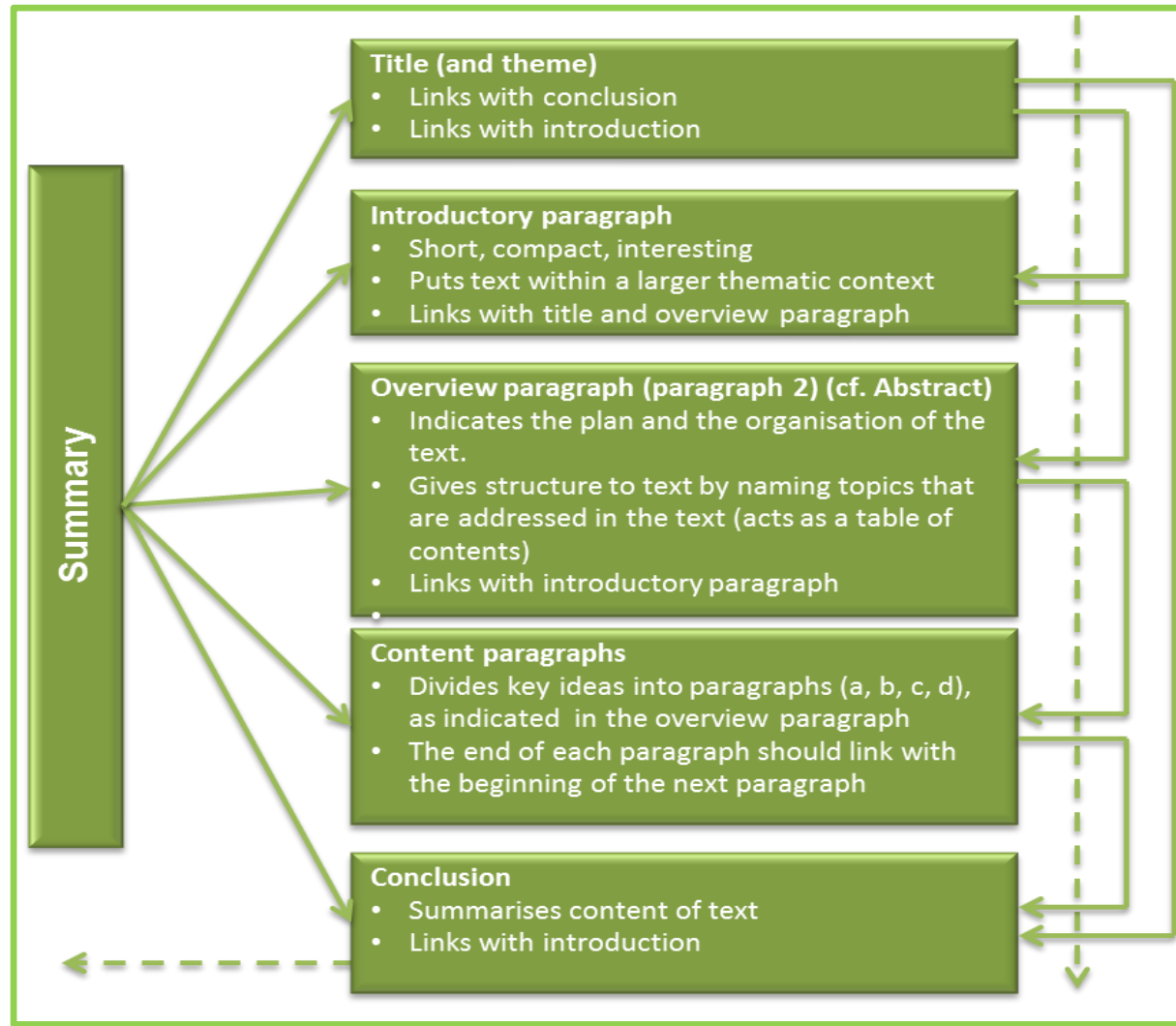
Text:

Modelling and forecasting Australian domestic tourism, by George Athanasopoulos and Rob Hyndman, published April 2007

- Only work with **1. Introduction**
- Cluster different parts of the introduction logically together.
- Highlight all the keywords (action/indicative, topic, scope) and link them by drawing lines from the one to the other. Use one colour only.
- Highlight words whose sole function is to link different parts of the text (within a cluster and across clusters). Use a different colour for this part of the exercise.



Text structure and readability



Coherence in texts

Coherence

The property of unity in a written text that stems from the relationship between its underlying ideas, and from the logical organisation and development of these ideas.



Coherence in texts

We use certain text structures to organise ideas:

- General text structure: introduction, body, conclusion
- Specific formats: usually specific to the discipline and the text type (research proposal, article, thesis, etc.)
- Logical flow and relationships between chapters, sections and paragraphs

Coherence in texts

How do we establish coherence?

Paragraphs may be organised according to a sequence of time (chronological order), space (describing something from top to bottom or foreground to background), arranging information in order of importance or presenting the most general information first and then move on to focus on the more detailed, specific information.

(Linking words / phrases and conjunctions)

Cohesion in texts



Cohesion

The property of flow and connection in a written text that stems from the linguistic links among its surface elements.

Cohesion in texts

A fluent academic argument is absolutely crucial in any postgraduate writing. Of course, an overall coherent structure is also of importance in any written text, but we need clear links in sentences and between sentences (and sections/clusters).

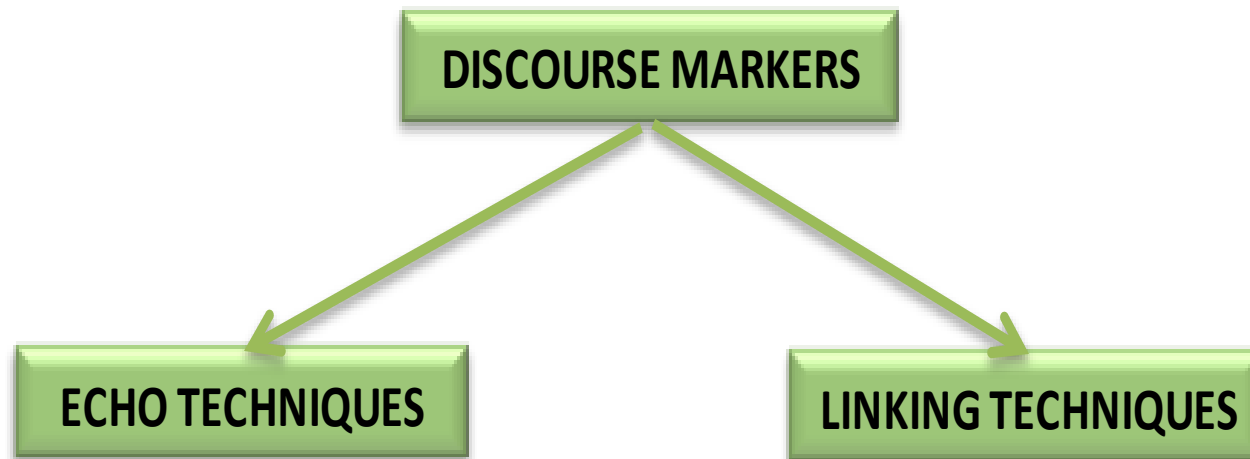
Apart from the echo techniques, that will be addressed below, we also use connecting devices (specific words or phrases) that connect our ideas in specific ways. We usually want to express a thematic relationship in and between sentences – see addendum.

Discourse markers: A road map



Simple definition:

Discourse markers are mainly divided into two types, namely echo techniques and linking techniques:



Discourse markers: Echo techniques

Keywords and their cohesive function

Words can echo the idea or meaning of other words. A writer can reinforce an idea or meaning by using words that echo that meaning. Synonyms, antonyms, word association, word derivation, word substitution, word repetition and even word omission can be used as an echo technique.

Discourse markers: Echo techniques

Synonyms

- The carbon footprint can be **reduced** by improving energy efficiencies and **decreasing** its reliance on fossil fuels to generate power.

Antonyms

- Paper manufacturers should examine ways of **reducing** greenhouse gas emissions and **increasing** their use of renewable energy.

Word association

- **Late blight** is the **pathogen** that caused the Irish Potato Famine in the mid-1800s in which four consecutive years of potato crop failure left millions of people starving or dead.

Word derivation

- The **genetic** information in a **genome** is held within **genes**, and the complete set of this information in an organism is called its genotype.

Word repetition

- The survival of a living organism depends on the continuous input of energy. Chemical reactions that are responsible for its structure and function are tuned to extract energy from substances that act as its food and transform them to help form new cells and sustain them.

Discourse markers: Linking techniques

Linking words

These discourse markers promote cohesion (a ‘sticking together’) at sentence level. This type of cohesion can be produced in the following two ways:

By signalling the relationship or links between sentences

- *The South African actress Charlize Theron is world famous because she won an Oscar – **because** indicates that her winning the Oscar is the **cause** of her world fame.*

By referring back (or forward) to a previous (or following) word or sentence

- *Charlize Theron won an Oscar in 2004. South Africa is proud of this girl from Benoni.*

Discourse markers: Linking techniques

The more common linking words are *pronouns* and *conjunctions*.

- They bring about textual unity on a **micro level**. This type of unity is also referred to as cohesion.
- Have a look at the addendum and see how **conjunctions** express various thematic/meaning relations when used to join two or more ideas.

Back to your own work

Work in pairs and help each other to establish better coherence and cohesion in your texts by employing the knowledge and skill you gained this morning.