

# Academic Writing that Flows & Resonates

Writing Workshop  
Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
UBC Writing Week  
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## Overview

- Workshop talk and tasks using pre-selected texts
  - Map of meanings at stake in academic writing
  - 1: Ensuring information is ordered according to *given/new information order*
  - 2: Balancing *preparing the reader vs getting to the point*
  - 3: Balancing *explicit and implicit logical* reasoning
- Questions and discussion about the Video Tutorial
- Working with your writing and sample texts from your discipline

It is assumed that workshop participants have completed the online writing tutorial

Part 1/3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETbCf8SvHW8>

Part 2/3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77RFqX8h6jE>

Part 3/3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kyhdmuOOnY>

## Writing Academically: Improving Tone and Flow by Packing and Unpacking Ideas

Open Educational Resource  
The University of British Columbia  
with thanks to UBC Vantage College

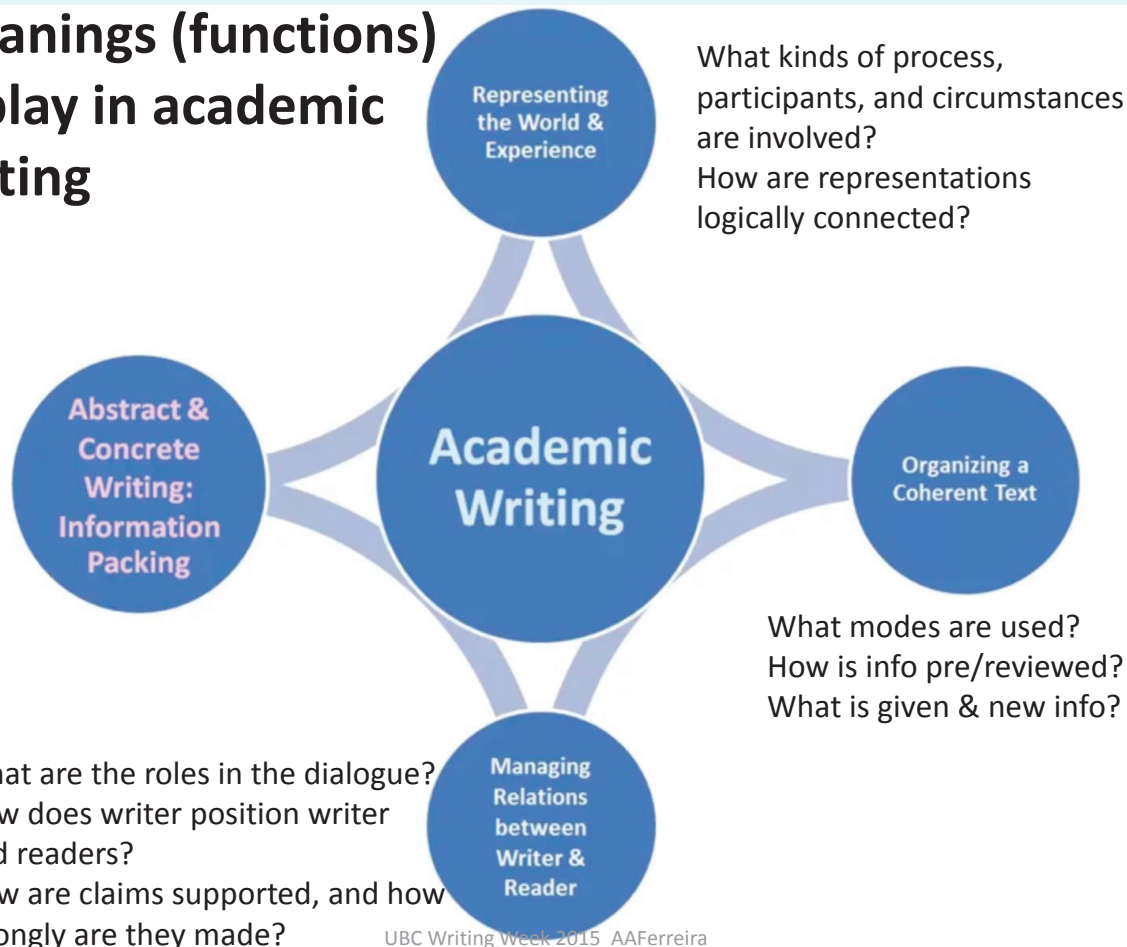
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2014

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## Meanings (functions) in play in academic writing



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# EXAMPLE of Connections between functions

## The Effects of Climate on Living Things

The term *climate* means average weather pattern of a region over a long period of time.

For example, the climate in northern Canada *is* very cold, with long, harsh winters and short, cool summers.

## Climate *affects* the seasonal growth of plants.

For example, bunchgrasses in BC's arid Okanagan region *look* as if they are dead during the hot summer.

In fact, the roots *are* alive.

## The bunchgrasses *begin to grow* again as soon as the soil receives some moisture, usually in the fall or early spring.

## Basic Consequential Explanation: 2 Stages

(Martin & Rose, 2008)

### Phenomenon Stage

defines or identifies a phenomenon (representation focuses on relations, 'be'; writer positioned as confident knower)

# Levels of Abstraction and Text Organization

## The Effects of Climate on Living Things

The term *climate* means average weather pattern of a region over a long period of time.

For example, the climate in northern Canada *is* very cold, with long, harsh winters and short, cool summers.

## Climate *affects* the seasonal growth of plants.

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In fact, the roots *are* alive.

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## Basic Consequential Explanation: 2 Stages

(Martin & Rose, 2008)

### Phenomenon Stage

defines or identifies a phenomenon (representation focuses on relations, 'be'; writer positioned as confident knower)

- Topic sentence/*main claim*
- concrete example showing it's easy to mis-identify the effect of climate on plants
- clarification: appeal to fact
- detailed illustration of effects or consequences of climate

### Explanation Stage

explains the consequences of the phenomenon (focus on 'do' & 'cause'; negotiated claims)

# Given/New Information Order: FLOW

## TASK 1: What is wrong with this version of the climate text?

Perhaps you agree that the individual sentences are OK, but somehow the sentences do not flow well together. **Why?**

Climate	<b>affects</b> the seasonal growth of plants.
For example, looking as if they are dead during the hot summer in BC's arid Okanagan region	<b>are</b> bunchgrasses.
In fact, what is alive	<b>are</b> the roots.
What begins to grow again as soon as the soil receives some moisture, usually in the fall or early spring,	<b>are</b> the bunchgrasses.

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**X**

Climate	affects the seasonal growth of plants.
For example, looking as if they are dead during the hot summer in BC's arid Okanagan region	are bunchgrasses.
In fact, what is alive	are the roots.
What begins to grow again as soon as the soil receives some moisture, usually in the fall or early spring.	are the bunchgrasses.

### Task 1 ANSWER:

Given (known) information	New information (begins with <i>main verb</i> )
Climate	<b>affects</b> the seasonal growth of <u>plants</u> .
For example, <u>bunchgrasses</u> in BC's arid Okanagan region	<b>look</b> as if they are dead during the hot summer.
In fact, the <u>roots</u>	<b>are</b> alive.
The <u>bunchgrasses</u>	<b>begin to grow</b> again as soon as the soil receives some moisture, usually in the fall or early spring.

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## Constant Theme

### World of our senses 1

Our sensory experience of the world is complex, rich, detailed and immediate.

Most sensory experience through all five of our senses, appears to be effortless except under the most extreme conditions.

It is continuous and generally coherent during our waking lives, no matter what they are.

Experience of the material world is however, personal and individual; it becomes the person's own.

#### Explanation

This is Pattern 1 where each sentence Theme develops given information from the previous Theme. This progression of an idea through all Themes shows the paragraph's focus.

## Linear Theme

### World of our senses 2

Our experience of the material world is immediate, rich, detailed and complex.

This complexity is partly due to the information received through our different senses.

All five senses- sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste- work continuously and coherently in any individual's waking life.

This personalising of all sensory experience is what makes the outside material world our own.

#### Explanation

In Pattern 2 each Theme develops given information in a part of the previous New. This progression, New to Theme, builds up to the main point of paragraph.

Reference: [http://learningcentre.usyd.edu.au/clearer\\_writing/](http://learningcentre.usyd.edu.au/clearer_writing/)

## Given/New Information Order, Technical Discourse, and Readers

Given info (title)

Given info (title)

Medicine: known part/  
whole relation

### Methods paragraph

[...] From Slogrove et al, 2010

***Pneumocystis jiroveci pneumonia (PCP)*** was diagnosed by immunofluorescence microscopy. **All infants with PCP** were investigated for cytomegalovirus (CMV) infection. **Whole blood** was assayed for the pp65 antigen and **urine** was submitted for CMV culture. **Blood lymphocyte immunophenotyping for subset enumeration** was done on a Becton Dickinson FACSCalibur 4 color flowcytometer with a standard Becton Dickinson MultiTEST reagent panel of monoclonal antibodies (BD Biosciences, Rivonia, South Africa). **Permission to publish** was obtained from the Committee for Human Research, Stellenbosch University.

Medicine: known part/  
whole relation

Expected procedure in HIV research

Expected ethics procedure<sup>10</sup>

# Handout

TASK: explain differences

TEXT A	
Given information	New information
<sup>1</sup> <b>William James</b> (1842 – 1910), often regarded as the founder of American psychology,	once described psychology as a “nasty little subject”.
<sup>2</sup> As <b>James</b>	noted,
<sup>3</sup> <b>psychology</b>	is difficult to study,
<sup>4</sup> and simple <b>explanations</b>	are few and far between.
<sup>5</sup> If <b>you</b>	enrolled in this course expecting simple answers to psychological questions, like why we become angry and fall in love,
<sup>6</sup> <b>you</b>	may be disappointed.
<sup>7</sup> But if <b>you</b>	enrolled in the hopes of acquiring more insight into hows and whys of human behaviour,
<sup>8</sup> [ <b>you</b> ]	stay tuned,
<sup>9</sup> because a <b>host of delightful surprises</b>	are in store.
<sup>10</sup> When [ <b>you</b> ]	reading this psychology textbook,
<sup>11</sup> [ <b>you</b> ]	prepare to find many of your preconceptions about psychology challenged.
TEXT B	
Theme	Rheme
<sup>1</sup> American <b>psychology</b>	was founded, according to experts, by William James (1842 – 1910).
<sup>2</sup> <b>Psychology</b> , to James,	was a “nasty little subject”.
<sup>3</sup> In his view, <b>psychology</b> ,	is difficult to study
<sup>4</sup> and <b>it</b>	offers few simple explanations.
<sup>5</sup> <b>This area of study</b>	does not offer the simple answers that many new university students expect, answers to psychological questions like why we become angry and fall in love.
<sup>6</sup> In contrast, <b>psychology</b>	does provide psychology students delightful insights into hows and whys of human behaviour.
<sup>7</sup> When [ <b>you</b> ]	reading this psychology textbook,
<sup>8</sup> [ <b>you</b> ]	prepare to find many of your preconceptions about psychology challenged.

## Noticing and Fixing Problems with Flow

When you edit your writing, you may find that some sentences in the paragraphs don't flow easily. The paragraph may sound disjointed when read.

In this case, check if the initial part in the sentences have been given in a previous part of the text – especially in the News parts.

If there is information that is New to the reader at the start, this may well be the source of the disruption in flow.

Strategy: Move information around in your sentences so that they maintain the structure of Known or Given Information in the subject position and New information in the remainder of the sentence.



## Strategies for Improving Flow

1. Swap elements within the clause
2. Switch from active voice ('they did it') to passive voice ('it was done (by them)')
3. Preview the ideas in the topic sentence

TASKS: Practicing strategies

## Strategies for Improving Flow

1. Swap elements within the clause

TASK: Practice strategy #1: Improve the poor flow in the following clause. Why? because the text has been discussing 'Lenin's contributions':

***The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 would have been very different without Lenin's contributions.***

## PACKING and UNPACKING IDEAS

What is the key difference between sentences 3 and 4 in terms of Given and New information order? 3 is in the Passive Voice; 4 is in the Active Voice

Compare

**Sentence 3**

**Sentence 4**

<b>Given/New: (and Logic)</b>	Presumes the reader wants to know about causes/factors of plant growth: The effect is treated as Given information and the cause is treated as New information.	Presumes the reader wants to know about the effects of climate: The cause is treated as Given information and the effect as New information.
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	Sentence/Clause		
	Given	New	
	noun group	verb	noun group
3	How bunchgrasses grow	is affected by	seasonal changes in moisture.
4	Climate	affects	the seasonal growth of plants.



## Strategies for Improving Flow

2. Switch from active voice ('they did it') to passive voice ('it was done (by them)')

TASK: Practice strategy #2: Improve the poor flow in the following clause. Why? because the text has been discussing 'early infrastructure development':

***Convicts built many new bridges, tollgates and miles of new roads throughout colonial Australia.***



## Strategy #3 for Improving Flow: Preview information

### Climate affects the seasonal growth of plants.

For example, bunchgrasses in BC's arid Okanagan region look as if they are dead during the hot summer.

In fact, the roots are alive.

**The bunchgrasses begin to grow again as soon as the soil receives some moisture, usually in the fall or early spring.**

#### Topic sentence/*main claim*

- concrete example showing it's easy to mis-identify the effect of climate on plants
- clarification: appeal to fact
- detailed illustration of effects or consequences of climate

#### Explanation

##### Stage

explains the consequences of the phenomenon (focus on 'do' & 'cause')

## NEXT:

## TASK to practice strategies for improving flow

## Handout

**TASK:** GIVEN/NEW information order

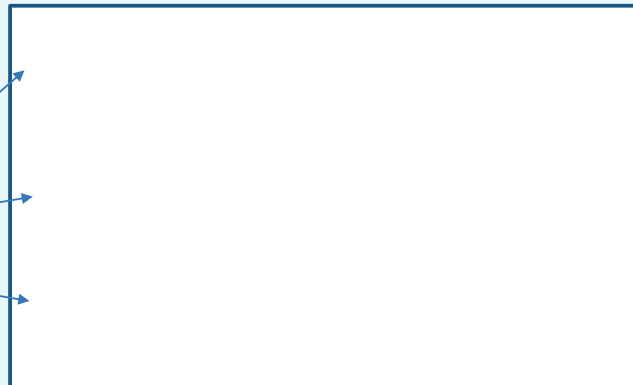
Revision of Three Body Sentences

Several gaps may be identified in the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) research comparing organically grown and non-organically grown vegetables (FDA 2012).

Residues from fertilizers and pesticides found in non-organically grown vegetables are not considered by the FDA's study.

The higher quantity of beta-carotene found in the majority of organic vegetables is not reported in the main findings of the study.

The lack of a comparison of the same kinds of vegetables, grown organically and non-organically presents another serious flaw in the study.



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The lack of a comparison of the same kinds of vegetables, grown organically and non-organically presents another serious flaw in the study.

## Improved

Several gaps are identified in the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) research (FDA, 2014) comparing organically-grown and non-organically grown vegetables.

We note that the study does not consider residues from fertilizers and pesticides in non-organically grown vegetables.

Another issue is that the higher quantity of beta-carotene found in organic vegetables is not reported in the main findings of the study.

The most serious problem is that the study compared different varieties of vegetables, leading us to question the design of the study

# Extension: Further improved?

Several gaps are identified in the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) research (FDA, 2014) comparing organically-grown and non-organically grown vegetables.

**First**, we note that the study does not consider residues from fertilizers and pesticides in non-organically grown vegetables.

**Then**, another issue is that the higher quantity of beta-carotene found in organic vegetables is not reported in the main findings of the study.

**Finally**, the most serious problem is that the study compared different varieties of vegetables, leading us to question the design of the study

## Reviewing: Distilling relevant information

Which of the three sentences (A, B, or C) would work best as a closing sentence for the above paragraph?

- A. It is clear that some problems identified with the study are more serious than others.
- B. This review of the FDA study therefore recommends that readers use caution in interpreting its findings.
- C. Caution in interpreting the findings of the FDA study is therefore recommended to readers.

in future, due to the extraordinary potential shown in early trials, as noted in a little-remarked paper (Itoh, [1981] 2006),

and delayed Topical Theme (subject)

<u>Doubtless,</u>	<u>however,</u>	<u>these developments</u>	<u>will draw the attention of scholars</u>
INTERPERSONAL THEME	TEXTUAL THEME	TOPICAL THEME (UNMARKED)	NEW

Our main concern for now is with Topical (ie informational) Themes (ie the subject of the main verb).

**To add confidence to your prose, aim begin 50% or more of the sentences with a Topical Theme ie with the subject of the main verb (which is aslo Given information)**

## Note: Subjects/theme vary in scope and length

noun phrase: subject of 1 <sup>st</sup> clause	verb	adverb phrase / circumstance	conjunction	noun phrase subject	verb	noun phrase object
1. The children	are growing	well	because	they	have received	medical treatment.
2. Children's growth rate	benefits	from medical treatment.				
3. The benefits of medical treatment to children's growth rate ...						

*Space for making meaning in clauses & sentences that is freed up by using grammatical packing*

# (Peer) Review & Feedback TASK

Read the text for Information Order and Flow:

1. Do clauses begin with known/expected/previously given information? (see before main verb)
2. Do the clauses end with new information, treated as 'the point'?
3. Is the pattern of information order sufficiently linear (in which previously New info becomes the basis for subsequent Given info)?
4. Are claims sufficiently well previewed (topic sentences) and occasionally reviewed (closing/transition sentences).
5. Do >50% of sentences begin with the subject of the main verb and thus get to the main point of focus quickly?

## TOPICS in ACADEMIC WRITING (2)

### Information packing

Is there an appropriate balance of concrete and abstract expression in your writing?

#### Is abstract expression used to

- PREVIEW ideas such as in topic sentences
- REVIEW information in closing and transition sentences
- And for summary, and paraphrasing of citations?
- Introduce technical and abstract terms?
- Compress processes or logical reasoning (*but so and*) that are already understood?

Is concrete expression used to unpack, clarify etc details?

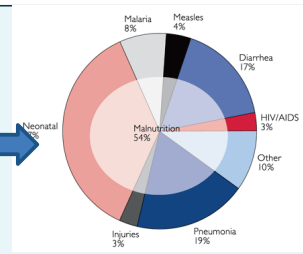
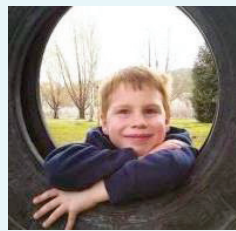
#### What is the level of Intricacy of Reasoning (aka grammatical intricacy)?

On average: What is the ratio of clauses to sentences in your writing and the writing in your discipline? Generally, across all sentences, a ratio of 1.4 – 2.2 clauses per sentences ensures a good balance of explicit and implicit reasoning.

#### How well-balanced are the noun groups?

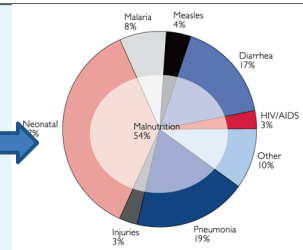
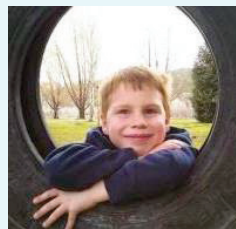
If your grammatical intricacy and choices of Theme, Given & New are fine and your writing is still not saying what you mean (and you have an idea of what you mean), then there's a good chance that the problems are in the way your form noun groups.

# Shifting registers using “Grammatical Un/Packing”



GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES		sentence				
		1 <sup>st</sup> clause			conjunction	2 <sup>nd</sup> clause
speech	noun phrase: subject of 1 <sup>st</sup> clause	verb	adverb phrase / circumstance	noun phrase subject		verb
	1.	The children	are growing	well	because	they
writing						
science						

# Shifting registers using “Grammatical Un/Packing”



GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES		sentence				
		1 <sup>st</sup> clause			conjunction	2 <sup>nd</sup> clause
speech	noun phrase: subject of 1 <sup>st</sup> clause	verb	adverb phrase / circumstance	noun phrase subject		verb
	1.	The children	are growing	well	because	they
writing	2. Children’s growth rate	benefits	from medical treatment.			
science						



## Waves of Concrete and Abstract Expression in Writing

**Shading:** darker shade means greater abstraction of sentence

**Bold font:** words & expressions contributing to abstraction

- i The term **climate** means **average weather pattern of a region over a long period of time.**
- ii For example, the **climate** in northern Canada is very cold, with long, harsh winters and short, cool summers.
- iii **Climate affects the seasonal growth of plants.**
- iv For example, bunchgrasses in BC's arid Okanagan region look as if they are dead during the hot summer.
- v In fact, the roots are alive.
- vi The bunchgrasses begin to grow again as soon as the soil receives some **moisture**, usually in the fall or early spring.

## Waves of Concrete and Abstract Expression in Writing

**Shading:** darker shade means greater abstraction of sentence

**Bold font:** words & expressions contributing to abstraction

- i **Defining** The term **climate** means **average weather pattern of a region over a long period of time.** **PACKING**
- ii **Giving example** For example, the **climate** in northern Canada is very cold, with long, harsh winters and short, cool summers. **UNPACKING**
- iii **Making general claim/Preview** **Climate affects the seasonal growth of plants.** **PACKING**
- iv **Supporting claim with example** For example, bunchgrasses in BC's arid Okanagan region look as if they are dead during the hot summer. **UNPACKING**
- v In fact, the roots are alive.
- vi **Supporting claim with example** The bunchgrasses begin to grow again as soon as the soil receives some **moisture**, usually in the fall or early spring. **UNPACKING**

# Explicit vs Implicit Logical Reasoning

Reasoning within the clause:  
implicit reasoning using  
causal verbs, adverbs, nouns  
etc

Reasoning between clauses:  
explicit reasoning using  
conjunctions

speech	1. The children	are growing	well	because	they	have received	medical treatment.
writing	2. Children's growth rate	benefits	from medical treatment.	<i>Space for making meaning in clauses &amp; sentences that is freed up by using grammatical packing</i>			
science	3. The benefits of medical treatment to children's growth rate ...						

## HANDOUT

Read about how to identify clauses in English

This is necessary to understand and practice variation in the intricacy of reasoning (associated with the variation between speech-like and writing-like language use)

**TASK: Practice Analysis**

Analyze for Intricacy of reasoning

Aim for 1.4 – 2.2 clauses per sentence

Lower IR risks making logical relations hard to identify & track

Higher IR risks making logical reasoning tedious; foregrounds writer's intervention in the flow of ideas

# Calculate intricacy of reasoning

But considering the Japanese experience, this interpretation of the liquidity trap is counter-intuitive. So what is wrong with the Friedman rule? In fact, in this analysis, we assume that prices are perfectly flexible, so food in restaurants and haircut services have their prices changes only infrequently, which means that people will care about changes in prices because it influences what firms decide in terms of demand and production. In this case, monetary policy has a stabilizing role, because it adjusts the level of interest rate. But as I explained before, ZLB creates a lot of trouble for the central bank as it tries to carry this stabilizing role through monetary policy.

This interpretation of the liquidity trap is counter-intuitive in view of the Japanese experience, highlighting the shortcomings of the Friedman rule. Under the assumption of perfectly flexible prices, with infrequent price changes in services such as hospitality and hairdressing, consumer concern about price change influences both demand and production decisions of firms. In this case, however, as noted above, the stabilizing role of central bank monetary policy through interest rate adjustment is seriously hampered by ZLB.

Sentences:

Clauses:

Sentences:

Clauses:

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KEY: Boundary between clauses: /  
Boundary between sentences: //

But considering the Japanese experience, /  
this interpretation of the liquidity trap is  
counter-intuitive.//So what is wrong with  
the Friedman rule://In fact, in this analysis,  
we assume that prices are perfectly  
flexible, / so food in restaurants and haircut  
services have their prices changes only  
infrequently, / which means that people will  
care about changes in prices, / because it  
influences what firms decide in terms of  
demand and production.//In this case,  
monetary policy has a stabilizing role, /  
because it adjusts the level of interest rate.//  
But as I explained before, / ZLB creates a lot  
of trouble for the central bank, / as it tries to  
carry this stabilizing role through monetary  
policy.//

This interpretation of the liquidity trap  
is counter-intuitive in view of the  
Japanese experience, / highlighting  
the shortcomings of the Friedman  
rule.//Under the assumption of  
perfectly flexible prices, with  
infrequent price changes in services  
such as hospitality and hairdressing,  
consumer concern about price  
change influences both demand and  
production decisions of firms.//In this  
case, however, as noted above, / the  
stabilizing role of central bank  
monetary policy through interest rate  
adjustment is seriously hampered by  
ZLB.//

Sentences: 5

Clauses: 11

Sentences: 3

Clauses: 5

$11/5 = 2.2$  IR: 2.2

At the upper range of  
appropriate intricacy

$5/3 = 1.6$  IR: 1.6

In the range of  
appropriate intricacy

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## (Peer) Review and Analysis of Writing

Analyze writing for Intricacy of reasoning

Aim for 1.4 – 2.2 clauses per sentence

**Lower IR** risks making logical relations hard to identify and track

**Higher IR** risks making logical reasoning tedious; foregrounds writer's intervention in the flow of ideas

## Strategies for Reducing Intricacy of Reasoning

See Video Tutorial

- Reducing the # of clauses
- Using clause-internal reasoning
- Expanding the role of noun groups

# Reducing # of clauses by changing two or more clauses into one clause plus circumstantial information

Eg the shift shown in the table above

“...because they received medical treatment” => “from medical treatment”

TABLE 1. Linking Words and Phrases

	Subordinators	Sentence Connectors	Phrase Linkers
<b>Addition</b>		furthermore in addition moreover	in addition to
<b>Adversative</b>	although even though despite the fact that	however nevertheless	despite in spite of
<b>Cause and Effect</b>	because since	therefore as a result consequently hence thus*	because of dueto as a result of
<b>Clarification</b>		in other words that is i.e.	
<b>Contrast</b>	while whereas	in contrast however on the other hand conversely	unlike
<b>Illustration</b>		for example for instance	
<b>Intensification</b>		on the contrary as a matter of fact in fact	

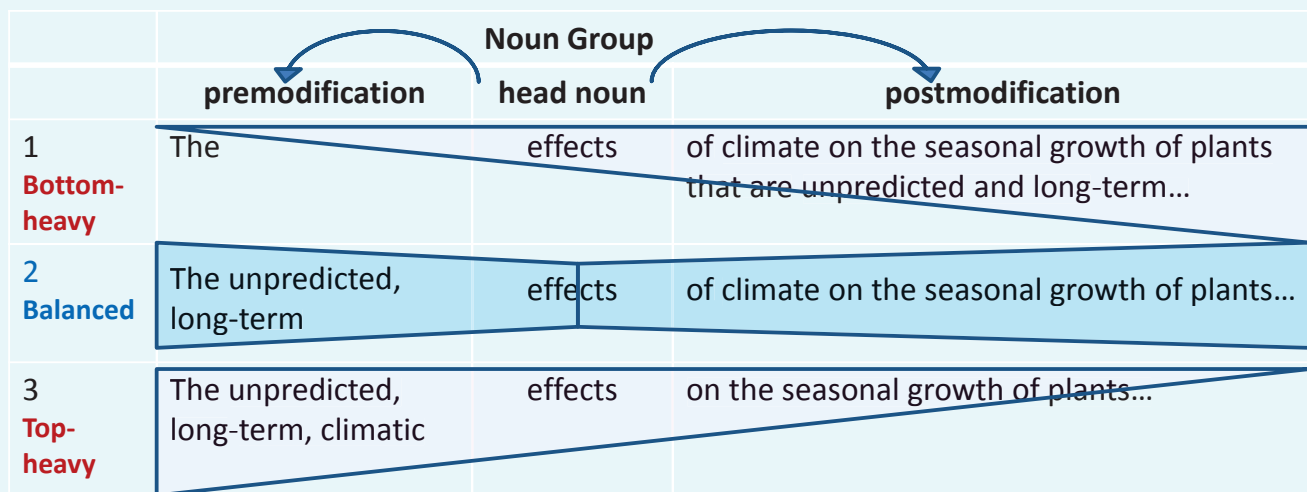
=>

Types of circumstantial element

Type		wh-item	examples of realization
1 Extent	distance	how far?	for; throughout 'measured'; nominal group
	duration	how long?	for; throughout 'measured'; nominal group
	frequency	how many times?	'measured' nominal group
2 Location	place	where? [there, here]	at, in, on, by, near; to, towards, into, onto, (away) from, out of, off; behind, in front of, above, below, under, alongside ... adverb of place: abroad, overseas, home, upstairs, downstairs, inside, outside; out, up, down, behind; left, right, straight ...; them, here
	time	when? [then, now]	at, in, on; to, until, till, towards, into, from, since, during, before, after adverb of time: today, yesterday, tomorrow; now, then
	means	how? [thus]	by, through, with, by means of, out of) + material, from
3 Manner	quality	how? [thus]	in + a + quality (e.g. dignified) + manner/way, with + abstraction (e.g. dignity); according to adverbs in -ly, -wise; fast, well; together, jointly, separately, respectively
	comparison	how? what like?	like, unlike; in + the manner of ... adverbs of comparison differently
	degree	how much?	to + a high/low/ ... degree/extent; adverbs of degree much, greatly, considerably, deeply [often collocationally linked to lexical verb, e.g. love + deeply, understand + completely]
4 Cause	reason	why?	because of, as a result of, thanks to, due to, for want of, for, of, out of, through
	purpose	why? what for?	for, for the purpose of, for the sake of, in the hope of
	behalf	who for?	for, for the sake of, in favour of, against [not in favour of], on behalf of
5 Contingency	condition	why?	in case of, in the event of
	default		in default of, in the absence of, short of, without [if it had not been for]
	concession		despite, in spite of

## Expanding Noun Groups

*Expanding noun groups is a good way to reduce Intricacy of Reasoning because many logical relations (that may otherwise connect two clauses with conjunctions) can be realized within the noun group, especially in the head noun and post-modification*





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Unsworth, L. (Ed). (2000). *Researching language in schools and communities: Functional linguistic perspectives*. London: Continuum.

## Online Writing Instruction based in Systemic Functional Linguistics

*Clearer Writing* (good foundation) University of Sydney: [http://learningcentre.usyd.edu.au/clearer\\_writing/](http://learningcentre.usyd.edu.au/clearer_writing/)  
*Report Writing in Science & Engineering*: <http://www.usyd.edu.au/learningcentre/wise/>

## Good Academic Writing Textbook for Grad Students (adopts some SFL)

[https://www.press.umich.edu/2173936/academic\\_writing\\_for\\_graduate\\_students\\_3rd\\_edition](https://www.press.umich.edu/2173936/academic_writing_for_graduate_students_3rd_edition)

A series of 4 little books, including:

[https://www.press.umich.edu/309338/telling\\_a\\_research\\_story\\_writing\\_a\\_literature\\_review](https://www.press.umich.edu/309338/telling_a_research_story_writing_a_literature_review)

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Happy researching  
and writing!

