

Approaches to teaching students to understand cohesion in texts

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Context



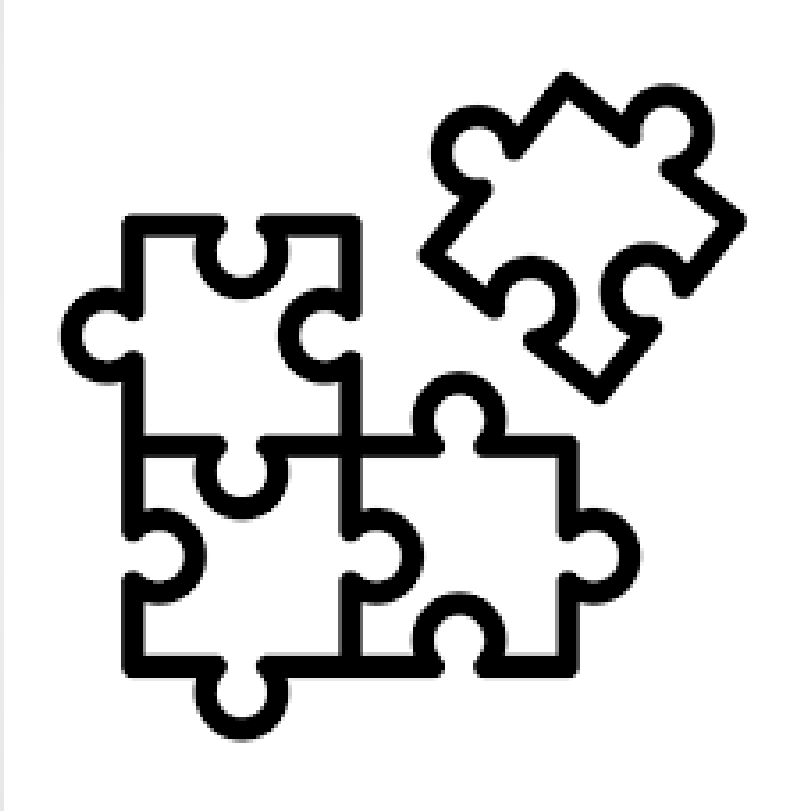
- Course designers for a new IELTS course with SEUP in the RMIT Danang language center.
- Students struggled with reading due to:
 - Not being able to understand complex clauses
 - Not being able to link ideas in paragraphs together
 - Not understanding vocabulary in texts
 - Not understanding the overall meaning of texts.
- Led to the development of new academic reading for cohesion sessions.

Session Aims



- Introduce what cohesion in texts is.
- Explain the benefits of teaching students to understand cohesion in texts.
- Share engaging mini-lessons (low prep) that teachers can incorporate in their classroom to teach students to understand cohesion in texts.
- These mini-lessons will focus on
 1. Lexical cohesion
 2. Referencing
 3. Signposting

What is textual cohesion?



- The relationship between different parts of a text with each other, where parts are connected and dependent.
- Halliday and Hasan (1976) identify 2 types, **grammatical cohesion** and **lexical cohesion**.
- The meaning of a text is dependent on a text's ability to be cohesive and to fit together as parts of a jigsaw do.
- **Cohesion is the glue that keeps a text together.**

What are the benefits of teaching our students cohesion in texts?



- Improved understanding of how words, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs connect.
- Improved overall understanding of the meaning of a text.
- Improved writing ability.
- Improved critical thinking capacity and ability to analyze texts more deeply.

Practice

Mini lesson 1: Lexical Cohesion in Texts

Lexical cohesion through substitution using synonyms and topic-specific vocabulary



- When a key noun or action is mentioned in a topic sentence or early in a paragraph, it is often referred back to later in the paragraph or text.
- This reference can be done by substituting the noun or phrase with synonyms and also using topic-specific vocabulary to expand on ideas.

What it looks like in practice



B Good learners work hard. A few things may come easily to learners, but most knowledge requires effort and good learners are willing to put in the time. They talk with others, read more, study more and carry around what they do not understand, thinking about it before they go to sleep, at the gym, on the bus. Good learners are persistent. When they fail, they carry on, confident that they will figure it out eventually. In the meantime, they learn from their mistakes.

Recap



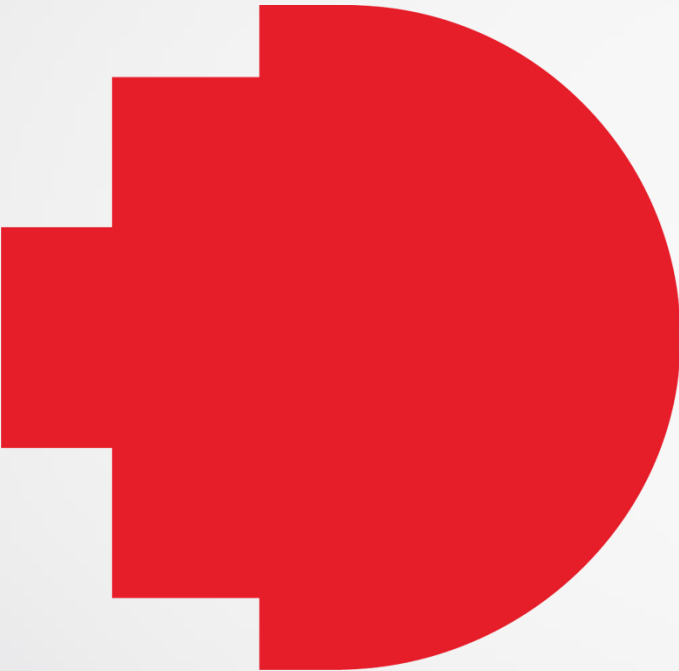
1. The educator provides students with a text with key vocabulary in the topic sentences of each paragraph highlighted.
2. Students work with a partner and identify all of the synonyms and topic-specific vocabulary in the paragraph (or text) that reference back to the keywords.

A time limit is put in place for each round.

3. The teacher then provides feedback to students.
4. Groups that find all of the synonyms and topic-specific vocabulary in a paragraph receive points.

Mini lessons 2 and 3: Referencing using pronouns, common referencing words, and relative pronouns.

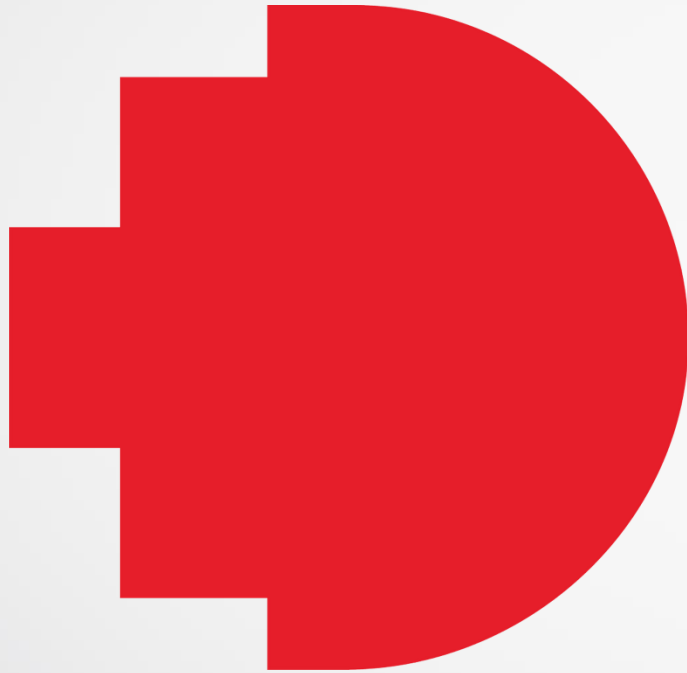
Types of pronouns and common referencing words

- 
- **Pronominal referencing** in reading refers to the use of pronouns to connect different parts of a text.
 - Other common referencing words may also be used to achieve this aim.
 - They help create cohesion by referencing backwards (and sometimes forwards) to key nouns or actions.

👉 *Emma loves her cat. **She** takes care of it every day.*

👉 ***This** is what I need: a long vacation.*

Types of pronouns and common referencing words



- Subject pronouns: I, you, he, she, it, we, they
- Object pronouns: me, you, him, her, it, us, them
- Possessive adjectives: *my, our, your, his, her, its and their*
- Possessive pronouns: *mine, ours, yours, his, hers, its and theirs*
- Demonstratives: *this, that, these, and those*
- Others: *such, the former, the latter, there, here*

What it looks like in practice

This: in the future, 86% of people living in developed countries will live in cities.

Their: cities

His: the ecologist, Dickson Despommier

These multiple farms: vertical farms

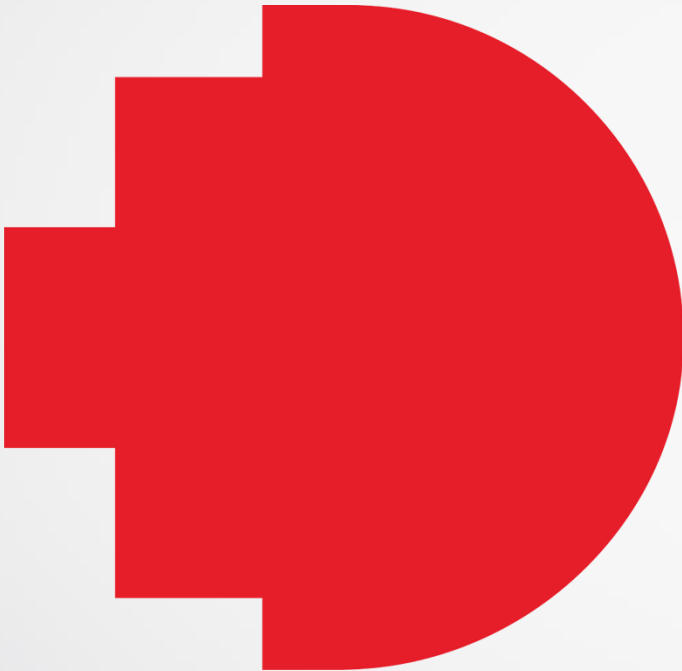
This use of technology: an app on a smartphone or tablet

E According to a recent prediction made by the United Nations, in the future, 86% of people living in developed countries will live in cities. With **this** in mind, an idea called 'vertical farming' has emerged. Essentially, vertical farming comes from the belief that cities should not rely on rural areas for food but should grow **their** own crops by creating multi-storey, high-tech greenhouses. The idea for vertical farms came from the ecologist Dickson Despommier, who turned **his** knowledge of parasites* into a way of looking at cities.



F Daniel Kluko of Green Spirit Farms predicts that software will be used to look after **these multiple farms** remotely. For example, an app on a smartphone or tablet will be able to handle the day-to-day care of crops. Kluko also believes that **this use of technology** will help to keep costs to a minimum, allowing vertical farms to compete with traditional farms.

Recap



- The educator provides students with a text with pronouns in each paragraph highlighted.
- Students work in pairs or groups.
- Students work together and decide what each highlighted pronoun or referencing device is referring to.

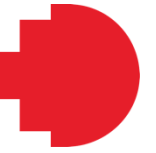
A time limit is put in place for each paragraph or to scan the whole text.

- The teacher provides feedback. Each correct identified pronoun with the correct reference choice receives points.



Applying this approach to relative pronouns

tion: Trusted



Cities all over the world are approaching the problem in different ways. In New York, where space is at a high premium, the mayor has argued that building at higher densities would preserve the social mix. At present there are strict limits on how high a residential building can rise, but the mayor has pointed out that relaxing the regulations and adding an extra storey to buildings may allow someone who has lived for 40 or 50 years in a neighbourhood to stay on.

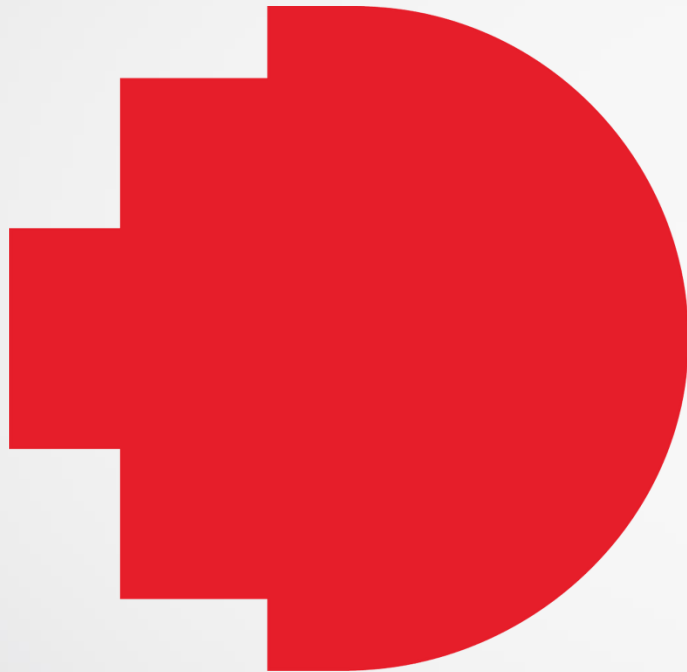
- Where: In New York
- Who: someone

Mini Lessons 4 and 5

Functions of cohesive features (Signposting language)

Conjunctions and cohesive devices

Example conjunctions and functions



Comparison • Than • Rather than • Whether • As much as • Whereas • While • Although • Instead of	Time • As soon as • Until • Whenever • Before • After
Concession • Although • Though • As long as • Even though	Reason • So • So that • Since • Because • In order to • As • On account of • Thanks to
Condition • If • Only if • Unless • Provided that	Manner • How • As though • As if
Relative clauses (not a conjunction, but functions similarly) • Who (people) • Which (thing) • Where (place) • When (time) • Whose (possession)	Explanation • That • for

What it looks like in practice



What sports psychologists recommend users of electronic fitness devices to do is raise their awareness of **how** their body looks. No one actually needs an app to tell them **that** they have had a bad night's sleep; the bags under their eyes can do that just as well. And **if** people want to lose weight, they may find it more effective to take a regular look at themselves in the mirror **rather than** try to motivate themselves to diet by checking everything they eat against a calorie counting app. Unfortunately, tracking the calories is also ineffective because the body metabolises* calories from sugar differently **than** those from fat.

How: Manner

That: explanation / expansion

If: condition

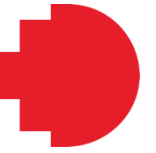
Rather than: comparison

Than: comparison

Recap



- Students work in pairs or groups.
- Students identify the function of the highlighted conjunctions.
- The teacher provides feedback. Each correctly identified subordinating conjunction with the correct function receives points.



Applying the approach to cohesive devices

Another method of using the hands to communicate is finger spelling, where each letter of the conventional alphabet has a corresponding finger sign. **However**, finger spelling does not represent an alternative to signing. There are only two situations in which the finger-spelling alphabet is used in sign language. **Firstly**, it can be used to spell out the names of people and places for which no sign exists. **Secondly**, finger spelling can be used to spell words for which the signer does not know the sign. **Nevertheless**, finger spelling is a very lengthy and laborious substitute for sign language.

- **However = contrast.**
- **Firstly... Secondly... = order.**
- **Nevertheless = contrast.**

How could I extend on these activities with higher level learners?

ALL ACTIVITIES

- Ask students to first scan the text for the feature of cohesion.
- At the end of the task, ask students to write a short 1 sentence summary for the overall idea of the text and meaning of each paragraph.
- Ask students to identify if the cohesive feature creates cohesion within sentences / between sentences, or between paragraphs.

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How could I extend on these activities with higher level learners?

LEXICAL COHESION

- Ask learners to first identify the topic sentence and key vocabulary item.
- Use concept checking questions to encourage analysis of what the vocabulary references and topic-vocabulary do.
- EG: persistent is an adjective to describe a hard worker.

PRONOUN REFERENCING

- Include both pronouns and relative pronouns for additional challenge.

SIGNPOSTING LANGUAGE (FUNCTIONS)

- Learners identify functions of both conjunctions and cohesive devices

Final challenge

Putting it all together



In groups, you will race your way through 3 challenges. There is a challenge for

- Lexical cohesion
- Referencing
- Signposting language

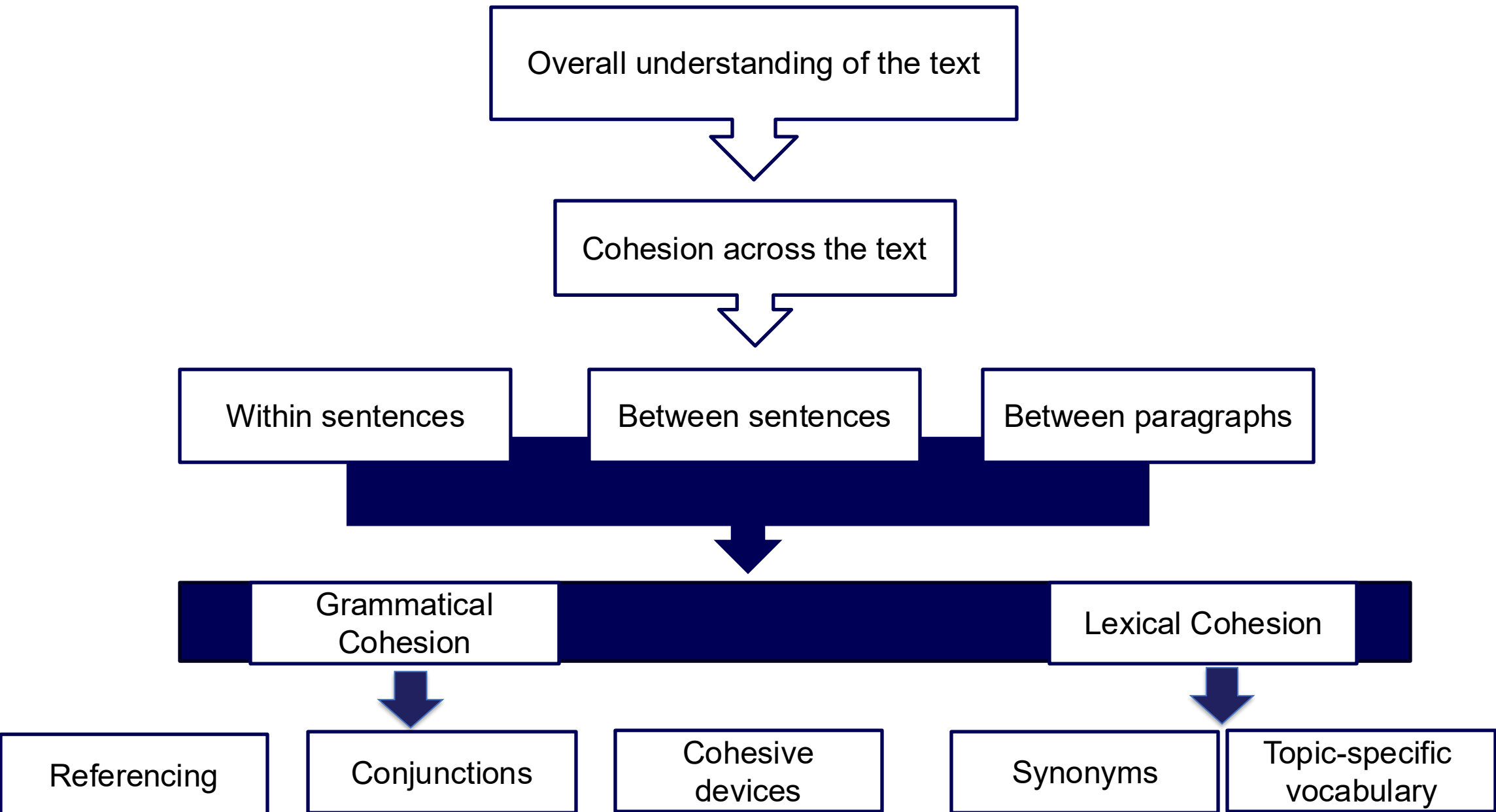
STEP 1: Take the challenge instructions from the envelope.

STEP 2: When you finish the challenge, ask for the answer key from the presenters.

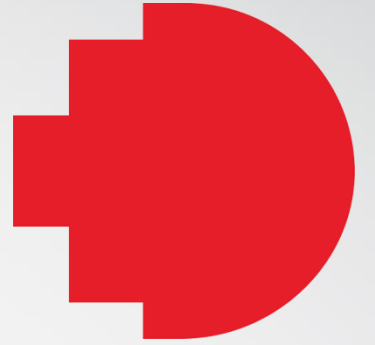
STEP 3: Check the answer key.

STEP 4: Proceed to the next challenge.

RECAP

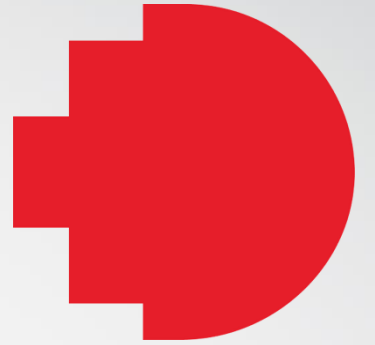


In summary



- We have looked at what cohesion in texts is.
 - How it benefits our students.
 - Mini-activities that can be incorporated into reading lessons from elementary level and up.
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- Which of these activities do you think you will try?
 - What challenges might you and your students have with these activities?
 - Any questions?

Reference List



- Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1976). Cohesion in English. English Language Series, London: Longman.
- Muhyidin, A. Solihati, N. Hamidiyah, A. Senjaya, A.(2020), 'Reference Grammatical Cohesion in a Literary Text and its Application to Language Learning in High School', Vol. 12. Online Submission, Vol. 12, No. 6, pp. 27–44.

Thank you

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