

Teaching Handouts: Coherence and Unity

Coherence means that the content of the project moves easily from piece to piece and makes sense to a naive reader. Unity means that your project has a sense of being one, complete unit that makes a purposeful statement.

Be sure that your total project has a beginning, climactic moment, and a conclusion.

Be sure that your project has a limited focus and a meaningful life theme.

Elements that can help coherence and unity:

- Chronology or sequence of events
- Timeline of related events
- Diagram or family tree
- Meta-story in which the smaller stories are embedded
- Repeated reference to one event
- One symbolic metaphor repeated throughout the project
- Visual Theme
- Selected quotes from a scholar, poem, song, work of literature.
- Transitional small pieces of writing (repetends)
- Overview in the introduction
- Reference to earlier events
- Concluding review

Problems to Avoid:

- Genre confusion--what is this?
- Narrator confusion--who is I?
- Chronology confusion--what happened first?
- Theme confusion--why am I reading this?
- Climactic confusion--what happens next?
- Interpretive confusion--how do you feel about this?

Give your reader cues early in each piece:

- Titles and Table of Contents
- Names of people and places
- Relationships stated clearly
- Visuals
- Repeated thematic phrases
- Overviews
- Guiding statements