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Preview

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Previewing the Academic Content

Imagine that you're in a meeting. The chairperson of the meeting is an important person—you need to get along well with her. You also know that two or three other people in the meeting always say “yes” to the chairperson, and she seems to appreciate them for agreeing with her.

However, there is a catch. The idea that is getting the most attention in the meeting is the chairperson's idea, but you don't like the idea at all. You think it will cause many problems.

The discussion is turning more and more to the chairperson's idea. People seem generally in favor of it. The time for the vote is coming. You have to make the decision:

Do you choose to be faithful to your opinion?

Or do you go against your conscience, decide that your relationships with the group are more important, and vote for the idea you dislike so much?

In this unit, we will look from a psychological point of view at the pressures people face in this kind of situation, and how these pressures often lead to bad decisions. We will also look at some ways to avoid these pressures.



Key Words

conformist *n* someone who behaves or thinks like everyone else because he or she does not want to be different. This word is often used in a negative way;

conform *v*; **conformity** *n*; **conformist** *adj*

conscience *n* the part of your mind that tells you whether your behavior is morally right or wrong

dissent *v* to disagree with an opinion or decision that most people accept;

dissent *n*

get along with

(someone) *v* to have a friendly relationship with another person

majority *n* most of the people or things in a group

pressure *n* a feeling that you should do something because other people want you to; sometimes this feeling is stressful;

pressure *v*

1. *Work with a partner. Answer the questions. Try to use the key words in your answers.*

1. In the imaginary scenario described above, are you a conformist or a non-conformist?
2. Whose view does the majority agree with, yours or the chairperson's?
3. How comfortable do you think conformity feels? How about dissent?
4. What are the advantages of being a conformist in this situation? What are the disadvantages?
5. What might the other people in the meeting be thinking?

2. *Think of a similar situation you have experienced. Discuss the questions in small groups. Try to use the key words.*

1. Describe the situation. What happened?
2. Describe the pressures you felt. What were they? How strong did they feel?
3. Did you try to resist the pressure? If so, how?
4. What did you do in the end?
5. How did you feel afterward?

This unit will help you recognize coherence and cohesion in readings and lectures. It will also show you how to create coherence and cohesion in your own writing.

Previewing the Academic Skills Focus


Understanding Coherence and Cohesion

A text has **coherence** if it makes sense—that is, if all the clauses together convey an overall message. A text is coherent when:

- all ideas are related to the main idea
- the order of ideas makes sense

If a text has coherence, we can say it is **coherent**.

Cohesion, on the other hand, is about the connections between ideas in the text. A cohesive text uses words and expressions that connect ideas within and between sentences. Words and expressions might include the following:

- pronouns and possessive adjectives, to avoid repeating phrases when you need to mention them again. For example: *The manager was a powerful person. She influenced many people.* 
- logical connectives, to show the relationship between ideas. For example: *The manager was a powerful person. However, not everyone liked her.*

If a text has cohesion, we can say it is **cohesive**.

Understanding coherence and cohesion will help you follow readings and lectures. Using techniques for cohesion will make your writing and speaking effective and clear.

Read the two paragraphs. Notice how they are different. Then complete the tasks on the next page.

Paragraph A

Human beings are social creatures—we live with others, work with others, and play with others. Our everyday contact with other people provides many opportunities for others to directly or indirectly influence our behavior, feelings, and thoughts. This process is called social influence. There are many forms of social influence. For instance, we might speak to a coworker in order to persuade him or her to follow our own opinion, even when our coworker might not want to. Alternatively, sometimes a person can influence other people just by being near them. For example, a boss may make a worker nervous, and as a result the worker might not be able to perform effectively.

Paragraph B

Human beings are social creatures—we live with others, work with others, and play with others. We had a difficult day today. The Canon DX3-AC is a superb camera. It ended very suddenly, with a flash. Like the horse, the cow can also digest grass. Red meat often has a high fat content. I knew the answer yesterday, I'm sure, but I seem to have forgotten it today. Social contact is important for child development. That's a big one, isn't it? There's a slight chance of rain tomorrow. My friend is afraid of her boss. Sometimes she is so nervous that her boss is watching her that she can't finish her project on time.



1. Underline the topic sentence of each paragraph, if there is one. In which paragraph are all ideas related to the main idea?
2. In the other paragraph, are there any sentences that don't relate to or support the main idea? Draw a line through them.
3. Which paragraph is coherent?
4. In the coherent paragraph, mark the following:
 - the logical connectives with a single line
 - the words that mean "human beings" with a double line.
 - the words that mean "another coworker" with a squiggly line.
 - the word that means "someone" with a dotted line.

2

Building Academic Reading Skills

In this section, you will look at the tools that effective writers use to create cohesion.

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Before You Read

Recognizing Cohesion

There are several ways that writers and speakers give cohesion to a text. Here are a few tools of cohesion:

- In **reference**, various words, such as pronouns and possessive adjectives, can be used to refer to a previous idea. There are many different pronouns—for example, *he, she, his, her, which, who, that, it, they, them, and those*. Possessive adjectives include *my, your, her, its, his, our, and their*.

Example

Social psychologists are interested in how individual people affect each other. They use many techniques for this, including experiments.

- Lexical cohesion occurs when words with connected meanings are used. This reduces repetition. One word may name a group of which the other is a member, or the two words may be synonyms.

Example

Social psychologists have carried out some very interesting experiments. In one study, researchers asked people to make a judgment.

- **Substitution** allows the writer to replace words in order to avoid repetition.

Example

Social psychology looks at the effect of other people on individuals. Sociology does [looks at the effect of other people on individuals] too. (*does too* replaces a phrase in the previous sentence)

- **Ellipsis** allows the author to omit some words in order to avoid repetition.

Example

Several academic disciplines look at how people influence each other. One [of these academic disciplines] is social psychology. Another [of these academic disciplines] is sociology.

- **Logical connectives**, covered in Unit 2, are also a form of cohesion.

Example

While both social psychology and sociology look at how people influence each other, social psychology focuses on the individual, whereas sociology focuses on the group.

3. Read the situations and think about your answers to the questions. Then discuss your answers and ideas with a partner.



1. Think back to a school you went to and the different groups of friends there.
 - How much did clothing and hairstyles vary within each group? Between groups?
 - How different or similar were your friends' clothes and their parents' clothes?
 - What do you think are the reasons for people's decisions about what clothes to wear?
2. Choose a job or a workplace that you know something about—perhaps a job that a family member does or a job you have had. Do not choose a job that requires a uniform.
 - Think about the people who do the job. How similarly or differently do they dress at work?
 - How similar or different are their work clothes to the clothes they wear outside work?
 - If people wore clothes that are very different from those of their coworkers, what would be the consequence?
 - How strong is the social influence on what people wear?

Global Reading

1. In this unit, you will read an excerpt from a psychology textbook. Read the introduction to the excerpt. Then complete the task.



"GOSH, ACKERMAN, DIDN'T ANYONE IN PERSONNEL TELL YOU ABOUT OUR CORPORATE CULTURE?"

Social pressure is more powerful than many people think. What are you wearing now? What are your classmates wearing? How similar do they look? Now think about a typical office. What do people usually wear? We can see the effects of social pressure in people's clothing styles, moods, and leisure activities (Totterdell, 2000; Totterdell et al, 1998). So, pressure to obey social norms¹ is strong. But can it be strong enough to make people change their minds, to express an opinion that is clearly completely wrong? One related phenomenon² that psychologists have identified is the Asch effect.

¹ **social norms** *n* the usual ways of doing things in a particular society

² **phenomenon** *n* something that happens or exists in society, science, or nature (especially something that academic researchers study)

Work with a partner. Which of the questions do you think the rest of the excerpt will answer? Circle them.

1. Can we see the effects of social pressure in people's clothing styles, moods, and leisure activities?
2. Is pressure to obey social norms strong?
3. Can social pressure be strong enough to make a person express an opinion that is clearly completely wrong?
4. What is the Asch effect?

2. Skim the text. Check your answers to the questions in Exercise 1.

THE ASCH EFFECT

1 Social pressure is more powerful than many people think. What are you wearing now? What are your classmates wearing? How similar do they look? Now think about a typical office. What do people usually wear? We can see the effects of social pressure in people's clothing styles, moods, and leisure activities (Totterdell, 2000; Totterdell et al, 1998). So, pressure to obey social norms is strong. But can it be strong enough to make people change their minds, to express an opinion that is clearly completely wrong? One phenomenon that psychologists have identified in this area is the Asch effect.

2 Solomon Asch carried out one of the most famous experiments in psychology (Asch, 1940, 1956). College students were told they would be participating in research about visual perception. They were shown cards with three lines of different lengths and asked to indicate which was the same length as another, standard line (see Figure 3.1). The correct answer was very clear. But when the students were put in a group of people who all



gave the wrong answer, the results were rather surprising.

3 In each experiment, a number of trials were held. In each trial, the confederates¹ (people who knew the real purpose of the experiment) gave their answers first. The only real subject of the experiment was always one of the last. In the first three trials, everyone agreed on the correct answer. But in the fourth, the first person to speak gave a response that

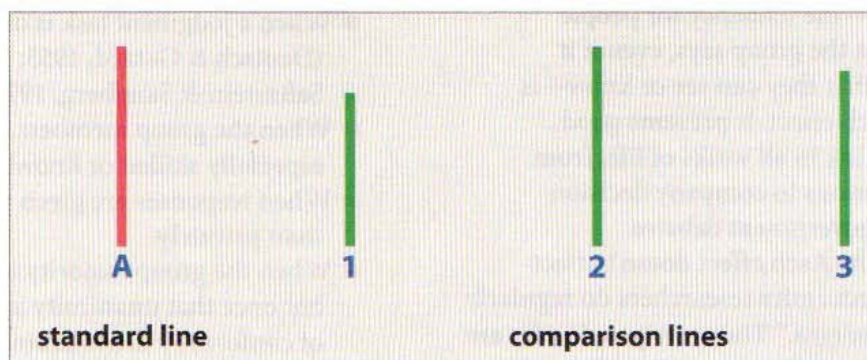


Figure 3.1 Participants in Asch's experiment were shown a standard line. They were also shown cards, each of which had three comparison lines. *Source:* Based on Asch (1956).

¹confederates *n* this word has a technical social psychology meaning here



was obviously incorrect, reporting that two lines were of the same length when actually they were clearly different. The next person said the same thing—and the next, and so on, until all group members except the real participant had unanimously agreed on an incorrect judgment. The real participant then had to decide whether to conform or to remain independent and believe the evidence of his or her own eyes.

4 What did the participants in this position finally do? As you might expect, nearly everyone showed signs of disbelief and discomfort when faced with a majority who saw the world so differently from how they did. As one participant later said, “I felt disturbed, puzzled, separated, like an outcast from the rest.” But despite the participants’ distress, the group pressure usually won. Three-quarters of those subjected to group pressure conformed to the false judgment of the group one or more times, while only a quarter remained completely independent on all trials. In various related studies, between 50 and 80 percent conformed with the majority’s wrong judgment at least once; one-third gave in to the majority’s incorrect judgments on half or more of the trials.

5 This effect—the tendency for people to follow what the group says, even if it contradicts what they can see or know—is called the Asch effect. It prevents good decision making in all walks of life, from family discussions to company decision making and government debates.

6 However, the Asch effect doesn’t affect everyone. Conformity researchers do regularly find “independents.” These are people who are uncomfortable with going against the majority, but who still point out mistakes when they see them even if the other group members dislike them for not being “team players.”

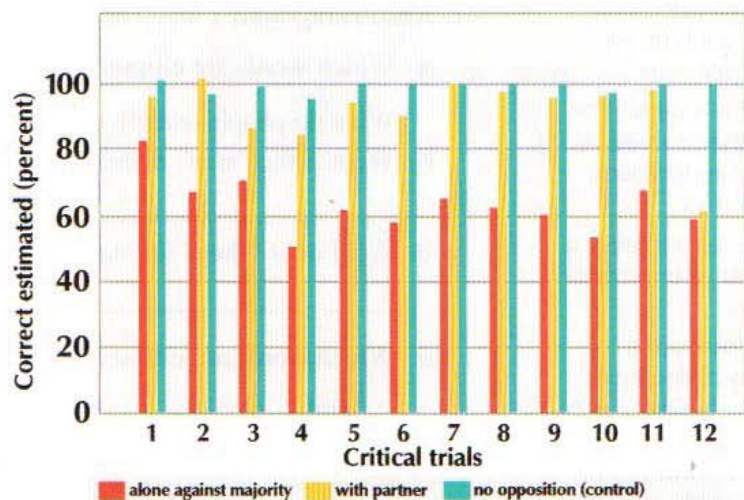
7 In further experiments, Asch identified three factors that influence whether people give in to group pressure: (1) the size of the majority, (2) the presence of a partner who dissented from the majority, and (3) the size of the difference between the correct answer and the majority’s position. He found that individuals tended to conform if as few as three people went with the false answer, but not if they faced only one or two. However, even in a large group, giving the person one ally² who dissented from the majority opinion sharply reduced conformity (as shown in Figure 3.2). With such a “partner,” nearly all subjects resisted the pressure to conform. Remarkably, however, some individuals continued to give in to the group even with a partner present. All who gave in underestimated the influence of social pressure and the frequency of their conformity. A few even said that they really had seen the lines as the majority had claimed. They claimed they were reporting accurately what they were seeing (Asch, 1956).

8 Numerous studies have revealed additional factors that influence conformity. Specifically, a person is more likely to conform under the following circumstances:

- When a judgment task is difficult or unclear (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Lott & Lott, 1961; Saltzstein & Sandberg, 1979).
- When the group members are seen as especially skilled or knowledgeable.
- When responses are given publicly rather than privately.
- When the group majority is unanimous—but once that unanimity is broken, the rate of conformity drops dramatically (Allen & Levine, 1969; Morris & Miller, 1975).

²ally *n* someone who helps and supports you when others are against you

Figure 3.2 This graph illustrates conformity across 12 trials, when individuals were grouped with a unanimous majority or had the support of a single dissenting partner. Note that a lower percentage of correct estimates means a greater degree of conformity with the group's false judgment.



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3. Skim the text again. Write the number of the paragraph(s) that give(s) you the following information.

1. Whether conformity applies to everyone: Paragraph(s) _____
2. Results of the experiment: Paragraph(s) _____
3. The circumstances under which Asch found that conformity happens: Paragraph(s) _____
4. How the experiment worked: Paragraph(s) _____
5. A definition of the Asch effect: Paragraph(s) _____

Compare your answers with a partner's. Explain the clues you used to find the answers.



Key Words

participant *n* someone who takes part in an activity, such as an experiment

subject *n* a person or animal that is used in a test or experiment;

subject *v*

trial *n* a test to see if a particular phenomenon happens

unanimous *adj* a unanimous decision, vote, etc. is one on which everyone agrees; **unanimity** *n*; **unanimously** *adv*

underestimate *v* to guess that something is smaller than it really is

Focused Reading

1. Work with a partner. Complete the tasks. Note that the symbol ¶ means “paragraph.”

1. Read Paragraphs 1 and 2 and answer the questions.

a. Which words are ellipsed from line 7? (¶1) Add it to the sentence.

What do people usually wear in a typical office _____?

b. What is the “area” mentioned in line 14? (¶1)

c. What does “they” in line 3 refer to? (¶2)

d. Which words are ellipsed from lines 6–12? (¶2) Add them to the sentences.

... and _____ asked to indicate which

_____ was the same length as another, standard, line. The

correct answer _____ was very clear. But ... the results

_____ were rather surprising.

2. Read Paragraphs 3 and 4 and answer the questions.

a. What words are ellipsed from lines 4–5? (¶3) Add them to the sentence.

The only real subject of the experiment was always one of the last

b. Which phrase earlier in the paragraph has the same meaning as “real participant” in lines 13–14? (¶3)

c. Which two words in Paragraph 3 are used to avoid repetition of “answer”?

(line 8) _____ (line 15) _____

d. What words does “did” in line 5 substitute for? (¶4)

e. Which words are ellipsed from lines 13–16? (¶4) Add them to the sentence.

In various related studies, between 50 and 80 percent _____ conformed with the majority’s wrong judgment at least once.

3. Read Paragraphs 5 to 8 and answer the questions.

a. What does “it” in line 4 refer to? (¶5)

b. Which two words in Paragraph 5 are used to avoid repetition of “discussions”?

c. Which words in paragraph 6 refer to “independents”?

d. Which word in Paragraph 7 is used to avoid repetition of “people” (line 8)?

e. Which word in Paragraph 7 is used to avoid repetition of “ally” (line 14)?

2. Read the text again and answer the questions. Then discuss the questions in small groups.

The Experiments

1. Were the researchers honest with the real participants before the experiment started? Explain.

2. What did the group members have to compare?

3. Who gave the last answers in each trial?

4. In the first three trials, did the researcher’s confederates give a correct or incorrect answer?

5. What was different about the third trial in each experiment?

6. How did the real participant feel when the majority held a different opinion?

The Results

1. What proportion of real participants was influenced by the majority in at least one trial?



2. How was this different in related studies?

Conclusions and Inferences

1. How does the Asch effect usually influence decision making?

2. Does the Asch effect apply only in some circumstances? Explain.

3. How does the Asch effect influence “independents”?

3. *Work with a partner. Do you think the situations in the chart will encourage conformity or encourage diverse views? Check (✓) the appropriate column. What evidence from the text did you use to find your answers?*

Key Words

diverse *adj* if things are diverse, they are very different from each other; **diversity** *n*

expert *n* someone who has special skill or knowledge about a subject; **expertise** *n*

	Encourages Conformity	Encourages Diverse Views
1. Giving everyone lots of complicated information just before a meeting		
2. Putting a few outside experts on the committee		
3. Taking votes by marking pieces of paper rather than raising hands		
4. Discussing issues that you know many in the group agree with		
5. Giving no time to think about the issues before the meeting		
6. Encouraging someone to be a “devil’s advocate”—that is, to disagree with everything even if they really agree		

4. *Work with a partner. How do you think you would respond if you were the subject of Asch’s experiment? Would you be an “independent”? Give an example from your own experience to support your answer.*