

# “Spaghetti Analysis” of Student Writing.



By: Dr. Chris McKenna  
*Business Communication and Legal Studies*  
Stephen F. Austin State University

## The Issue: *Lack of Coherence.*

- Sentence One has NO clear connection to...
- Sentence Two, which has NO clear connections to...
- Either Sentence One or Three—and so on.



## The Solution: *Spaghetti Analysis*.

- S.....V.....O.
- S.....V.....O and O.
- S....V.....O.....and V....O.

## Sample Analysis: *A Cohesive Piece of Writing.*

- “The Death of Patient Zero,” Tom Junod, *Esquire*, August 1, 2015, 102-114.

BCM 247: Analyzing "cohesive" writing.

Excerpt Source: Tom, J. (2015, August 1). The Death of Patient Zero. Esquire, 102-114.

Background: From an essay describing the attempts to save the life of a patient named Stephanie Lee, who was assisted in her journey by two journalists—the author, Tom Junod, and a colleague, Mark Warren—who both became medical advocates for the story's subject. Here's a sample of Junod's writing (from page 105):

"That's how the story began. But it's not how it ended. Mark began talking to Stephanie, as a friend and confidant. He talked to her nearly every day, and shortly after, Eric Schadt<sup>1</sup> promised to do what he could for her—shortly after, it became clear that Stephanie was going to go from being cancer patient to experimental subject—she asked Mark, "Will you take this walk with me?"

Mark and I had a lot of ambitions for the story of Stephanie Lee, not all of them journalistic. We wanted to live it rather than simply write it. We wanted to connect the disparate worlds of Eric Schadt and Stephanie Lee—of New York and Mississippi—for the benefit of both of them. We wanted to give Stephanie access to the cutting-edge medicine generally available only to rich people. We wanted to see what happened when a powerful medical institution like Mount Sinai devoted the full weight of its financial and intellectual resources to saving one patient, even one with an incurable form of cancer. And all those things happened, pretty much. But only Mark and Stephanie took the walk all the way to the end.

A lot of people try to help Stephanie in this story. A few even try to be heroes. But they are all human, and so they do only what they can. It is left to Stephanie and Mark to give everything they have."

Your Task: Using circles (for any given "first" reference) and arrows (used in cases to tie subsequent words or phrases "back" to circled words), map the "cohesive" elements that tie this passage together. Focus especially on the subjects, object, verbs, and pronouns in these sentences.

<sup>1</sup> A genomist who mapped the DNA of Stephanie's cancer cells in the hopes of enabling a cancer researcher, Dr. Ross Cagan, to identify a drug cocktail to cure her of terminal colorectal cancer. Both worked at Mount Sinai.

TWO DIFF "THEY" HERO, YET CLEAR REFS.

NOTE: COHESIVE WRITING TIES THINGS TOGETHER IN MULTIPLE WAYS.

## Sample Analysis: *A Non-cohesive Piece of Writing.*

- Versus an Instructor mocked-up piece of prose that suffers from disconnected sentences...

AND

- From a sloppy and incorrect use of pronouns.

Account of a high-school football game (Inefficient and confusing):

Students are wandering back and forth in the vicinity of the running track and they are worried and somewhat bored. The team is still in the gym. When the time has finally arrived, the boys and girls sing the school song at the same time while the team is making its way down the hill towards the field. They have their game jerseys, trousers, and cleats on. Each has a desire to have a good game and to be a success. They hope to have good luck and to be sharp and think that their practices have been the right ones for this opponent. The other team is the team that everyone cannot stand...with a passion. The people who are in the stands really want the other team to be beaten and to be beaten badly. No one who is on our side likes them at all. The players want that to be true, also.

Total number of words: 155

- LACK OF X-SENTENCE CONNECTIONS / COHESION
- TOO MANY "DISCONNECTED" PRONOUNS... ESP. LEADING SENTENCES OFF.
- LACK OF PARALLEL SENTENCE STRUCTURES IMPEDES OUR CONSUMPTION & UNDERSTANDING

## The Learning Outcomes.

- **S V O** reminder.
- **Spaghetti Mapping** as a revision tool to identify...
- **Orphan sentences** needing remediation.
- **Pronoun** use requires **discipline**—so **BE WARY**.
- Longer—yet more **connected—sentences** lead to more flowing and clearer prose.