



Organization

The method of organization you choose for your essay is just as important as its content. Without a clear organizational pattern, your reader could become confused and lose interest. The way you structure your essay helps your readers draw connections between the body and the thesis, and the structure also keeps you focused as you plan and write the essay.

When you begin to draft your essay, your ideas may seem to flow from your mind in a seemingly random manner. Your readers, who bring to the table different backgrounds, viewpoints, and ideas, need you to clearly organize these ideas in order to help process and accept them.

A solid organizational pattern gives your ideas a path that you can follow as you develop your draft. Knowing how you will organize your paragraphs allows you to better analyze your thoughts. Planning the structure of your essay before you choose supporting evidence helps you conduct more effective and targeted research.

(University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing).

Parts of an Essay

Introduction

The first paragraph(s) of the essay set up the topic and thesis. The introduction is where terms are defined, the topic clarified, and the purpose of the essay is outlined. While the introduction does not go into depth about the topic, it does provide the reader with enough background to see where and how the body of the essay will support the thesis. The organization is also outlined in the introduction.

Body

The paragraphs present information to support the thesis. Specific claims, sources, analysis, data, and other information is presented in an order that guides the reader through ideas and presents connections.

Conclusion

The conclusion is the last paragraph(s) of the essay, and it is where the writer wraps up the ideas. It presents summary of the thesis and the main points of the essay and outlines any leftover questions and the significance of the essay's topic.

Typical Organizational Structures

Chronological

Presenting the information in chronological order is effective for history, process, and narrative essays. It begins with the first event and moves through events in the order that they happen. It can

work from the event forward or from the event backwards. For example, an essay on COVID-19 might begin with the first case and move through to an analysis of today or it might begin with today and move backwards through time to the first case recorded.

Spatial

This type of organization works best for descriptive essays. It begins with one part of the item being described and works top to bottom, bottom to top, left to right, right to left, inside to outside, outside to inside, most prominent part to least prominent, or least prominent to most prominent. For example, an essay on a car might start talking about the front bumper and move through the vehicle to the rear bumper or it might start with the inside of the car and move to the outside.

Persuasive

In a persuasive essay, you want to intentionally build toward a climax, your most important point, or a dramatic and convincing conclusion. You may also organize it by starting with the most dramatic point if you have some very compelling points to make after it. For example, a paper about the need for improved homeless shelters might be organized by describing conditions in three different shelters, saving the most dramatic and disturbing scene for last or first.

Where you place your thesis is also important in establishing persuasive structure. There are three main organizational formats: *Support Structure*, *Discovery Structure*, *Pro-and-Con Structure* (also called *Exploratory*).

Support Structure: the paper will develop from a central idea, the thesis, which is located early on in the introduction. The body paragraphs then work to support this statement.

Visual Breakdown:

1. Intro, containing a thesis/claim
2. Point 1
3. Point 2
4. Point 3
5. Point 4, etc.
6. Conclusion

Discovery Structure: this paper will develop into a clear thesis/claim. It will move from one point to the next to lead the reader into the thesis.

Visual Breakdown:

1. Intro, containing a thesis/claim
2. Point 1
3. Point 2
4. Point 3
5. Point 4, etc.
6. Conclusion, thesis, or solution



Pro-and-Con/Exploratory Structure: this paper can utilize either support or discovery structure. In this type of paper, the writer investigates a topic through its positives/negatives and/or advantages/disadvantages. The points are linked carefully with transitions as the writer moves between points.

Visual Breakdown (example 1):

1. Intro/Thesis
2. Pro
3. But con
4. But pro
5. But con
6. But pro
7. But con, which leads to
8. Conclusion

Visual Breakdown (example 2):

1. Intro/Thesis
2. Pro
3. And con
4. And pro
5. But con
6. And pro
7. And con, which leads to
8. Conclusion

Compare/Contrast

To compare two items or subjects is to draw attention to their similarities as well as their differences. To contrast is to narrow the scope, focus on ways that the items/subjects are different. There are two ways to structure a comparison/contrast paper: *Block Style* or *Point-to-Point*. Below, we will look at example structures for an essay comparing Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton.

Block Structure: the subjects will be treated one at a time

1. Introduction
2. Carter
 - a. Foreign Policy
 - b. Military Spending
 - c. Personal Character
3. Clinton
 - a. Foreign Policy
 - b. Military Spending
 - c. Personal Character
4. Conclusion

Point-to-Point Structure: paragraphs are organized according to the ideas, alternating between the two subjects

1. Introduction
2. Foreign Policy
 - a. Carter
 - b. Clinton
3. Military Spending
 - a. Carter
 - b. Clinton



4. Personal Character
 - a. Carter
 - b. Clinton
5. Conclusion

Notice that the order that ideas appear is consistent throughout the paper.

Resources

<https://open.lib.umn.edu/writingforsuccess/front-matter/publisher-information/>



Connors Writing Center