

Methods Of Organizing Your Essay

Now that you have narrowed your topic and formulated a thesis, you know what you are going to write about; organizing your essay will help you determine how to write it. While a well-formulated, sharpened thesis will give your essay purpose and direction, careful structuring and organization will ensure that every part of your essay works to support and develop that thesis.

Ideas as we first conceive them may tumble in an improvised dance, but an essay needs the formality of a beginning, a middle and an end. Organizing before you write gives your ideas a structure to cling to; it allows you to articulate, analyze, and clarify your thoughts. If you devise some structure for your essay before you begin to search for supporting evidence, you will be able to conduct a more effective and directed search.

Organization (or reorganization) is a continuous process, it goes on simultaneously with other activities, such as narrowing your topic, forming your thesis statement, and conducting your research. However, **formal organization generally involves two components: determining a method of organization for the essay, and drawing up an outline which applies your ideas to that method.**

As you begin to plan your essay, give some thought to the methods you will use to organize the evidence that will support your thesis. You will want to choose methods which are most suitable to your subject and the type of essay you have been assigned. Here are some principles of organization:

Chronological order:

Paragraphs separate the process or series of events into major stages. (See also chronology within paragraphs.)

Classification:

~~Paragraphs divide the material into major categories and distinguish between them.~~

Increasing importance:

Paragraphs are arranged so that the most important point comes last, thus building the essay's strength.

Cause and effect

Indicates causal relationships between things and events. Be careful, however, not to mistake coincidence with causality, nor to disregard other possible causes. See the various pages that deal with logic.

Comparison and contrast

Involves lining up related ideas for a detailed account of similarities and differences. In this kind of essay it is important to decide whether you will be concentrating on similarities or differences. In general, the more similar things are, the more you concentrate on the differences, and vice versa. If you are comparing two works by the same author, or two love poems, for example, what will most interest you will be the differences between them; if you are comparing an Anglo-Saxon riddle with a science fiction novel the differences will be obvious enough that you will want to

focus on the similarities.

Although one pattern should serve as the overall organizing framework, your argument can benefit from a combination of these strategies. For example, while the paragraphs may be arranged in ascending order of importance, within the paragraphs it is likely that you will incorporate comparisons, causes, classification or chronology. These principles apply to both the greater structure of the essay and each individual idea.