

Organization is a key feature of successful writing. The degree to which your ideas will be clearly communicated to your audience depends substantially on your reader's ability to follow your "train of thought." All essays consist of individual points that, when combined, demonstrate the reasonableness, soundness, or coherence of the essay's argument or meaning.

Consider whether what you have to say has a logical order, or "organizing force." This is a product of the relationship between the parts of your essay and can inform your decisions about what the order of the essay's parts should be.

Chronology

Any narrative is a sequence of events that share a chronological relationship. Put simply, A happens, then B, then C, and so on. For narratives, the most obvious order for the parts is chronological.

Example: In *Anna Karenina*, they meet, they fall in love, they die. In that order.

A "how to" paper would probably follow a similar structure. Your reader needs to perform the first step, then the second, and so on.

Example: First, bake the cake. Then frost it.

Reader Comprehension

There are some points your reader may need to know before he or she can understand another.

Example: Because decisions in Texas Hold 'em often depend on odds and hand strength, this paper will discuss those two topics before addressing specific situations that call for certain actions.

Hierarchy

Some points are more impressive or crucial than others. Decide what the distribution of these points should be. Most impactful first? Save for a big finish?

Example: My husband is great: He is there for me when I need him most, plus he makes great spaghetti.

Example: I got cool birthday presents: a sweater, a book, and a million dollars.

Some points are subordinate and should be placed under the main point.

Example: The US government is divided into three branches, one of which is

Tips

Compare and contrast the points of your paper to see what ideas belong together.

Consider which order allows for smooth transitions from point to point. Transitions work best when the relationships between points have a logical relationship.

The so-called “five paragraph format” does not work for all academic papers. You will generally have more than five paragraphs.

General Organization

While some assignments call for specific structures, many use this traditional format: Introduction, Body Paragraphs, Conclusion. The Sam Houston Academic Success Center has handouts for each of these.

Generally, you should identify the major points that support your thesis. These will be the topics of the body paragraphs. Cover one major point at a time, fleshing out each with sub-points, specifics, quotes, explanations, etc. Begin a new paragraph when you move to a new major point. For more help with paragraphing, including how to structure the paragraphs and how they relate to your thesis statement, consult the Academic Success Center’s handout on Topic Sentences. Below is an example of an outline for body paragraphs in an essay discussing the characteristics of sharks:

- I. Topic: Sharks—Characteristics
 - A. Senses
 - i. Smell
 - ii. Sight
 - iii. Magnetic Field
 - a. Ampullae of Lorenzini
 - B. Physical Features
 - i. Streamlined body
 - ii. Teeth
 - iii. Fins
 - C. Etc.

Information on this handout borrowed from:

The Longwood Guide to Writing (Second Edition) by Ronald F. Lunsford and Bill Bridges.
Strategies for College Writing (Second Edition) by Jeanette Harris and Ann Moseley.