

Organization

👤 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, or story, 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 *Romeo and Juliet*, 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 she can understand another.

Example: Because decisions in Texas Hold 'em often depend on hand strength and odds, 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 simply subordinate to and belong below others.

Example: The US government is divided into three branches, one of which is Congress. Congress is itself separated into two houses, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Theme

👉 Some essays discuss topics through a progression of themes.

Example: Throughout its long history, Sam Houston State University has developed a diverse range of services to assist students in succeeding in many academic fields. (I: History; II: Student Services; III: Academic fields)

Tips

- 👉 Compare and contrast the points of your paper to see what ideas should belong together.
- 👉 Consider which order allows for smooth transitions from point to point. Transitions work best when the relationships between points have been considered.
- 👉 The so-called “five paragraph theme” does not work for most academic papers. You simply will have more than three major paragraphs.

Organization, General

- 👉 While some assignments call for specific structures, others will be best fulfilled with this traditional format: Introduction, Body Paragraphs, Conclusion. The Sam Houston State Writing Center has handouts and tutorials 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 Writing Center’s handout/tutorial on Topic Sentences.
- 👉 For more help with organization, see our handout on Outlining.

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.