

Organizing the Evidence



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Once you've generated supporting evidence, you're ready to *organize* that material. Even highly compelling evidence won't illustrate the validity of your thesis or achieve your purpose if it isn't organized properly. Some writers can move quickly from generating support to writing a clearly structured first draft. (They usually say they have sequenced their ideas in their heads.) Most, however, need to spend some time sorting out their thoughts on paper before starting the first draft; otherwise, they tend to lose their way in a tangle of ideas.

When moving to the organizing stage, you should have in front of you your scratch list (see pages 31–33) and thesis, plus any supporting material you've accumulated

since you did your prewriting. To find a logical framework for all this material, you'll need to (1) determine which pattern of development is implied in your evidence, (2) select one of four basic approaches for organizing your evidence, and (3) outline your evidence. These issues are discussed in the following sections.

USE THE PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT

As you saw on pages 29–30 and 46–48, the patterns of development (definition, narration, process analysis, and others) can help you develop prewriting material and generate evidence for a thesis. In the organizing stage, the patterns provide frameworks for presenting the evidence in an orderly, accessible way. Here’s how.

Each pattern of development has its own internal logic that makes it appropriate for some writing purposes but not for others. (You may find it helpful at this point to turn to pages 29–30 so you can review the broad purpose of each pattern.) Imagine that you want to write an essay *explaining why* some students drop out of college during the first semester. If your essay consisted only of a lengthy narrative of two friends floundering through the first month of college, you wouldn’t achieve your purpose. A condensed version of the narrative might be appropriate at some point in the essay, but—to meet your objective—most of the paper would have to focus on *causes* and *effects*.

Once you see which pattern (or combination of patterns) is implied by your purpose, you can block out your paper’s general structure. For instance, in the preceding example, you might organize the essay around a three-part discussion of the key reasons that students have difficulty adjusting to college: (1) they miss friends and family, (2) they take inappropriate courses, and (3) they experience conflicts with roommates. As you can see, your choice of pattern of development significantly influences your essay’s content and organization.

Some essays follow a single pattern, but most blend them, with a predominant pattern providing the piece’s organizational framework. In our example essay, you might include a brief *description* of an overwhelmed first-year college student; you might *define* the psychological term *separation anxiety*; you might end the paper by briefly explaining a *process* for making students’ adjustment to college easier. Still, the essay’s overall organizational pattern would be *cause-effect* because the paper’s primary purpose is to explain why students drop out of college. (See pages 69–70 for more information on the way patterns often mix.)

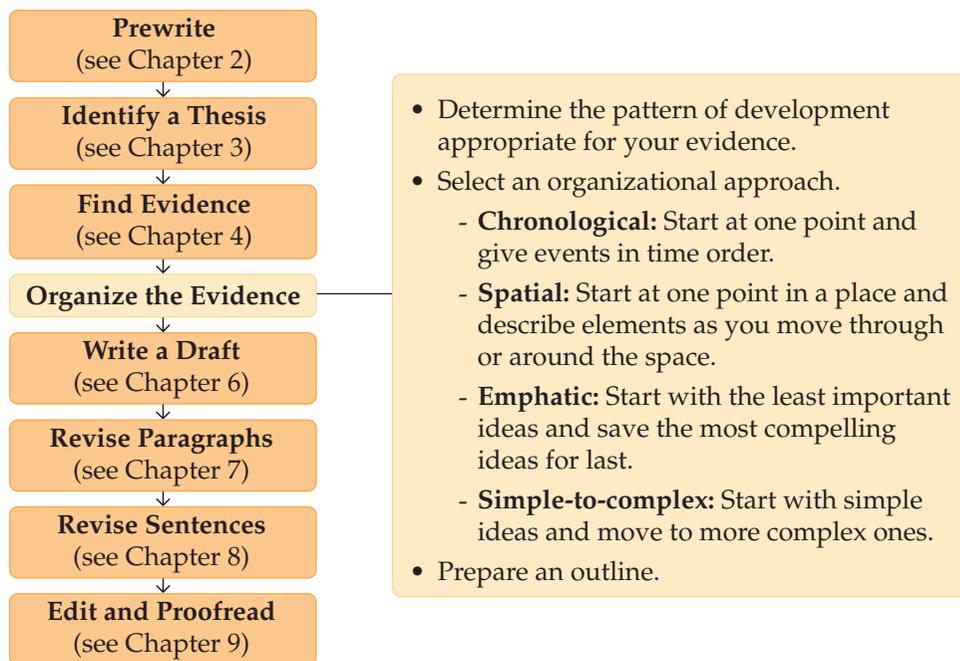
Although writers often combine the patterns of development, your composition instructor may ask you to write an essay organized according to a single pattern. Such an assignment helps you understand a particular pattern’s unique demands. Keep in mind, though, that most writing begins not with a specific pattern but with a specific *purpose*. The pattern or combination of patterns used to develop and organize an essay evolves out of that purpose.

SELECT AN ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH

No matter which pattern(s) of development you select, you need to know four general approaches for organizing the supporting evidence in an essay: chronological, spatial, emphatic, and simple-to-complex. (See Figure 5.1 on page 56.)



FIGURE 5.1
Process Diagram: Organizing the Evidence



Chronological Approach

When an essay is organized **chronologically**, supporting material is arranged in a clear time sequence, usually starting with what happened first and ending with what happened last. Occasionally, chronological arrangements can be re-sequenced to create flashback or flashforward effects, two techniques discussed in Chapter 11 on narration.

Essays using narration (for example, an experience with prejudice) or process analysis (for instance, how to deliver an effective speech) are most likely to be organized chronologically. The paper on public speaking might use a time sequence to present its points: how to prepare a few days before the presentation is due; what to do right before the speech; what to concentrate on during the speech itself. (For examples of chronologically arranged student essays, turn to pages 203–204 in Chapter 11 and pages 319–321 in Chapter 14.)

Spatial Approach

When you arrange supporting evidence **spatially**, you discuss details as they occur in space, or from certain locations. This strategy is particularly appropriate

for description. Imagine that you plan to write an essay describing the joyous times you spent as a child playing by a towering old oak tree in the neighborhood park. Using spatial organization, you start by describing the rich animal life (the plump earthworms, swarming anthills, and numerous animal tracks) you observed while hunkered down *at the base* of the tree. Next, you re-create the contented feeling you experienced sitting on a branch *in the middle* of the tree. Finally, you describe the glorious view of the world you had *from the top* of the tree.

Although spatial arrangement is flexible (you could, for instance, start with a description from the top of the tree), you should always proceed systematically. And once you select a particular spatial order, you should usually maintain that sequence throughout the essay; otherwise, readers may get lost along the way. (A spatially arranged student essay appears in Chapter 10 on pages 160–162.)

Emphatic Approach

In **emphatic** order, the most compelling evidence is saved for last. This arrangement is based on the psychological principle that people remember best what they experience most recently. Emphatic order has built-in momentum because it starts with the least important point and builds to the most significant. This method is especially effective in argumentation-persuasion essays, in papers developed through examples, and in pieces involving comparison-contrast, division-classification, or causal analysis.

Consider an essay analyzing the negative effect that workaholic parents can have on their children. The paper might start with a brief discussion of relatively minor effects, such as the family's eating mostly frozen or take-out foods. Paragraphs on more serious effects might follow: children get no parental help with homework; they try to resolve personal problems without parental advice. Finally, the essay might close with a detailed discussion of the most significant effect—children's lack of self-esteem because they feel unimportant in their parents' lives. (The student essays on pages 242–243 in Chapter 12, pages 357–359 in Chapter 15, and pages 429–430 in Chapter 17 all use an emphatic arrangement.)

Simple-to-Complex Approach

A final way to organize an essay is to proceed from relatively **simple** concepts to more **complex** ones. By starting with easy-to-grasp, generally accepted evidence, you establish rapport with your readers and assure them that the essay is firmly grounded in shared experience. In contrast, if you open with difficult or highly technical material, you risk confusing and alienating your audience.

Assume you plan to write a paper arguing that your college has endangered students' health by not making an all-out effort to remove asbestos from dormitories and classroom buildings. It probably wouldn't be a good idea to begin with a medically sophisticated explanation of precisely how asbestos damages lung tissue. Instead, you might start with an observation that is likely to be familiar to your readers—one that is part of their everyday experience. You could, for

example, open with a description of asbestos—as readers might see it—wrapped around air ducts and furnaces or used as electrical insulation and fireproofing material. Having provided a basic, easy-to-visualize description, you could then go on to explain the complicated process by which asbestos can cause chronic lung inflammation. (See pages 395–397 in Chapter 16 for an example of a student essay using the simple-to-complex arrangement.)

Depending on your purpose, any one of these four organizational approaches might be appropriate. For example, assume you planned to write an essay developing Harriet Davids’s thesis: “Being a parent today is much more difficult than it was a generation ago.” To emphasize that the various stages in children’s lives present parents with different difficulties, you’d probably select a *chronological* sequence. To show that the challenges parents face vary depending on whether children are at home, at school, or in the world at large, you’d probably choose a *spatial* sequence. To stress the range of problems that parents face (from less to more serious), you’d probably use an *emphatic* sequence. Finally, to illustrate today’s confusing array of theories for raising children, you might take a *simple-to-complex* approach, moving from the basic to the most sophisticated theory.

PREPARE AN OUTLINE

Do you, like many students, react with fear and loathing to the dreaded word *outline*? Do you, if asked to submit an outline, prepare it *after* you’ve written the essay? If you do, we hope to convince you that having an outline—a skeletal version of your paper—*before* you begin the first draft makes the writing process much more manageable. The outline helps you organize your thoughts beforehand, and it guides your writing as you work on the draft. Even though ideas continue to evolve during the draft, an outline clarifies how ideas fit together, which points are major, which should come first, and so on. An outline may also reveal places where evidence is weak, prompting you to eliminate the material altogether, retain it in an unemphatic position, or do more prewriting to generate additional support.

Like previous stages in the writing process, outlining is individualized. Some people prepare highly structured, detailed outlines; others make only a few informal jottings. Sometimes outlining will go quickly, with points falling easily into place; at other times you’ll have to work hard to figure out how points are related. If that happens, be glad you caught the problem while outlining, rather than while writing or revising.

To prepare an effective outline, you should reread and evaluate your scratch list and thesis as well as any other evidence you’ve generated since the prewriting stage. Then decide which pattern of development (description, cause-effect, and so on) seems to be suggested by your evidence. Also determine whether your evidence lends itself to a chronological, a spatial, an emphatic, or a simple-to-complex order. Having done all that, you’re ready to identify and sequence your main and supporting points.

The amount of detail in an outline will vary according to the paper’s length and the instructor’s requirements. A scratch outline consisting of words or phrases



(such as the one on page 33 in Chapter 2) is often sufficient, but for longer papers, you'll probably need a more detailed and formal outline. In such cases, the suggestions in the accompanying checklist will help you develop a sound plan. Feel free to modify these guidelines to suit your needs.



OUTLINING: A CHECKLIST

- Write your purpose, audience, tone, point of view, and thesis at the top of the outlining page.
- Below the thesis, enter the pattern of development that seems to be implied by the evidence you've accumulated.
- Record which of the four organizational approaches would be most effective in sequencing your evidence.
- Reevaluate your supporting material. Delete anything that doesn't develop the thesis or that isn't appropriate for your purpose, audience, tone, and point of view.
- Add any new points or material.
- Group related items together. Give each group a heading that represents a main topic in support of your thesis.
- Label these main topics with roman numerals (I, II, III, and so on). Let the order of numerals indicate the best sequence.
- Identify subtopics and group them under the appropriate main topics. Indent and label these subtopics with capital letters (A, B, C, and so on). Let the order of the letters indicate the best sequence.
- Identify supporting points (often reasons and examples) and group them under the appropriate subtopics. Indent and label these supporting points with arabic numbers (1, 2, 3, and so on). Let the numbers indicate the best sequence.
- Identify specific details (secondary examples, facts, statistics, expert opinions, quotations) and group them under the appropriate supporting points. Indent and label these specific details with lowercase letters (a, b, c, and so on). Let the letters indicate the best sequence.
- Examine your outline, looking for places where evidence is weak. Where appropriate, add new evidence.
- Double-check that all main topics, subtopics, supporting points, and specific details develop some aspect of the thesis. Also confirm that all items are arranged in the most logical order.

The sample outline on pages 60–61 develops the thesis, “Being a parent today is much more difficult than it was a generation ago.” You may remember that this is the thesis that Harriet Davids devised for the essay she planned to write in response to the assignment on page 24. Harriet’s scratch list, based on her brainstorming, appears on page 33. (You may want to review



page 33 to see how Harriet later reconsidered material on the scratch list in light of her thesis.) When you compare Harriet's scratch list and outline, you'll find some differences. On the one hand, the outline tends to contain more specifics (for instance, the details about sexually explicit materials—on the Internet, in magazines, in movies, and on television). On the other hand, the outline doesn't include all the material in the scratch list. For example, after reconsidering her purpose, audience, tone, point of view, and thesis, Harriet decided to omit from her outline the section on day care and the point about AIDS.

Harriet's outline is called a **topic outline** because it uses phrases, or topics, for each entry. (See pages 317–318, 356–357, and 480–481 for other examples of topic outlines.) For a more complex paper, a **sentence outline** might be more appropriate (see pages 236–237 and 614–616). You can also mix phrases and sentences (see pages 393–394), as long as you are consistent about where you use each.

In Harriet's outline, note that indentations signal the relationships among the essay's points and that the same grammatical form is used to begin each entry on a particular level. For instance, since a noun phrase ("Distractions from homework") follows Roman numeral I, noun phrases also follow subsequent Roman numerals. Such consistency helps writers see if items at a particular level are comparable.

Purpose: To inform

Audience: Instructor as well as class members, most of whom are 18–20 years old

Tone: Serious and straightforward

Point of view: Third person (mother of two teenage girls)

Thesis: Being a parent today is much more difficult than it was a generation ago.

Pattern of development: Illustration

Organizational approach: Emphatic order

I. Distractions from homework

A. At home

1. MP3 players
2. Computers--Internet, computer games
3. Television

B. Outside home

1. Malls
2. Movie theaters
3. Fast-food restaurants

II. Sexually explicit materials

A. Internet

1. Easy-to-access adult chat rooms
2. Easy-to-access pornographic websites

- B. In print and in movies
 1. Sex magazines--Playboy, Penthouse
 2. Casual sex
- C. On television
 1. Soap operas
 2. R-rated comedians
 3. R-rated movies on cable

III. Increased dangers

- A. Drugs--peer pressure
- B. Alcohol--peer pressure
- C. Violent crimes against children

(If you'd like to see the first draft that resulted from Harriet's outline, turn to pages 86–87. Hints for moving from an outline to a first draft appear on pages 64–66. For additional suggestions on organizing a first draft, see the diagram on page 85.)

Before starting to write your first draft, show your outline to several people (your instructor, friends, classmates). Their reactions will indicate whether your proposed organization is appropriate for your thesis, purpose, audience, tone, and point of view. Their comments can also highlight areas needing additional work. After making whatever changes are needed, you're in a good position to go ahead and write the first draft of your essay.

ACTIVITIES: ORGANIZING THE EVIDENCE



1. The following thesis statement is accompanied by a scrambled list of supporting points. Prepare a topic outline for a potential essay, being sure to distinguish between major and secondary points.

Thesis: Our schools, now in crisis, could be improved in several ways.

Certificate requirements for teachers
 Schedules
 Teachers
 Longer school year
 Merit pay for outstanding teachers
 Curriculum
 Better textbooks
 Longer school days
 More challenging course content

2. For each of the following thesis statements, there are two purposes given. Determine whether each purpose suggests an emphatic, chronological, spatial,

or simple-to-complex approach. Note the way the approach varies as the purpose changes.

- a. *Thesis:* Traveling in a large city can be an unexpected education.
Purpose 1: To explain, in a humorous way, the stages in learning to cope with the city's cab system
Purpose 2: To describe, in a serious manner, the vastly different sections of the city as viewed from a cab
 - b. *Thesis:* The student government seems determined to improve its relations with the college administration.
Purpose 1: To inform readers by describing efforts that student leaders took, month by month, to win administrative support
Purpose 2: To convince readers by explaining straightforward as well as intricate pro-administration resolutions that student leaders passed
 - c. *Thesis:* Supermarkets use sophisticated marketing techniques to prod consumers into buying more than they need.
Purpose 1: To inform readers that positioning products in certain locations encourages impulse buying
Purpose 2: To persuade readers not to patronize those chains using especially objectionable sales strategies
3. Return to the paragraph or first draft you prepared in response to activity 4 or activity 5 in Chapter 4 (pages 52–53). Applying the principles discussed in Chapter 5, strengthen the organization of the evidence you generated. (If you rework a first draft, save the draft so you can refine it further after reading the next chapter.)
 4. Each of the following brief essay outlines consists of a thesis and several points of support. Which pattern of development would you probably use to develop the overall organizational framework for each essay? Which pattern(s) would you use to develop each point of support? Why?
 - a. *Thesis:* Friends of the opposite sex fall into one of several categories: the pal, the confidante, or the pest.

Points of Support

- Frequently, an opposite-sex friend is simply a “pal.”
- Sometimes, though, a pal turns, step by step, into a confidante.
- If a confidante begins to have romantic thoughts, he or she may become a pest, thus disrupting the friendship.

- b. *Thesis:* What happens when a child gets sick in a two-income household? Numerous problems occur.

Points of Support

- Parents often encounter difficulties as they take steps to locate a babysitter or make other child-care arrangements.

- If no child-care helper can be found, a couple must decide which parent will stay at home—a decision that may create conflict between husband and wife.
 - No matter what they do, parents inevitably will incur at least one of several kinds of expenses.
5. For one of the thesis statements given in activity 4, identify a possible purpose, audience, tone, and point of view. Then, use one or more patterns to generate material to develop the points of support listed. Get together with someone else to review the generated material, deleting, adding, combining, and arranging ideas in logical order. Finally, make an outline for the body of the essay. (Save your outline. After reading the next chapter, you can use it to write the essay's first draft.)
 6. Look again at the thesis and scratch outline you refined and elaborated in response to activity 6 in Chapter 4 (page 53). Reevaluate this material by deleting, adding, combining, and rearranging ideas as needed. Then, in preparation for writing an essay, outline your ideas. Consider whether an emphatic, chronological, spatial, or simple-to-complex approach will be most appropriate. Finally, ask at least one other person to evaluate your organizational plan. (Save your outline. After reading the next chapter, you can use it to write the essay's first draft.)

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