

Handout: Paragraph Development—Using Organizational Patterns to Help You Develop and Organize Your Essay*

Organizational patterns represent distinct ways to think about the parts of your paper, the order in which you will place them, and the relationships among the parts. These patterns can shape your paper as the dominant pattern or can combine as minor patterns within the dominant pattern to organize some of the sections. Imagine them alone or in combinations accompanied by an introduction and a conclusion. Use them both to help you think about your ideas and to organize them.

Claim with Reasons (or Reasons Followed by a Claim)

This pattern takes the following form: *statement of claim*, followed by *reason 1*, *reason 2*, *reason 3*, and so forth. Set this pattern up by writing the claim, following it with the word *because*, and listing some reasons. Or list some reasons, follow them with the word *therefore*, and write the claim. The reasons may be distinct and different from one another and set up like separate topics in your paper. Or you may create a chain of related reasons by asking *why* and answering *because* five or six times. Also, some of your reasons may be used to refute, others to prove, and still others to show how your claim will meet the needs and values of the audience. Support all reasons with facts, examples, and opinions. You may use transitional phrases such as *one reason*, *another reason*, *a related reason*, and *a final reason* to emphasize your reasons and make them stand out in your paper.

Cause and Effect (or Effect and Cause)

The cause-and-effect pattern may be used to identify one or more causes followed by one or more effects or results. Or you may reverse this sequence and describe effects first and then the cause or causes. For example, the causes of water pollution might be followed by its effects on both humans and animals. You may use obvious transitions to clarify cause and effect, such as “What are the results? Here are some of them,” or simply the words *cause*, *effect*, and *result*.

Applied Criteria

This pattern establishes criteria or standards for evaluation and judgment and then shows how the claim meets them. For example, in an argument about children in day care, you might set out physical safety, psychological security, sociability, and creativity as criteria for measuring the success of day care. The use of such criteria can be very helpful in proving and supporting your claim by showing with evidence how your criteria have either been met or have not been met. The applied criteria pattern of organization is obviously useful for value arguments. It is also useful in policy arguments to establish a way of evaluating a proposed solution. You may want to use the words and phrases *criteria*, *standards*, *needs*, and *meets those criteria or needs* to clarify the parts of your paper.

Problem-Solution

The problem-solution pattern is commonly used in policy (or proposal) papers. There are at least three ways to organize these papers. The problem is described, followed by the solution. In this case, the claim is the solution, and it may be stated at the beginning of the solution section or at the end of the paper. An alternative is to propose the solution first and then describe the problems that motivated it. Or a problem may be followed by several solutions, one of which is

*As presented in: Wood, Nancy. Essentials of Argument. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006.

selected as the best. When the solution or claim is stated at the end of the paper, the pattern is sometimes called the *delayed proposal*. For a hostile audience, it may be effective to describe the problem, show why other solutions do not work, and finally suggest the favored solution. You may use the words *problem* and *solution* to signal the main sections of your paper for your reader.

Chronology or Narrative

Material arranged chronologically is explained as it occurs in time. This pattern may be used to establish what happened for an argument of fact (or for a categorical claim). For example you may want to give a history of childhood traumas to account for an individual's current criminal behavior. Or you may want to tell a story to develop one or more points in your argument. Use transitional words like *then*, *next*, and *finally* to make the parts of the chronology clear.

Deduction

Recall that deductive reasoning involves reasoning from a generalization, applying it to cases or examples, and drawing a conclusion. For instance, you may generalize that the open land in the West is becoming overgrazed; follow this assertion with examples of erosion, threatened wildlife, and other environmental harms; and conclude that the government must restrict grazing to designated areas. The conclusion is the claim. You may use such transitional phrases as *for instance*, *for example*, and *to clarify* to set your examples off from the rest of the argument and *therefore*, *thus*, *consequently*, or *in conclusion* to lead into your claim.

Induction

The inductive pattern involves citing one or more examples and then making the “inductive leap” to the conclusion. For instance, five or six examples of boatloads of illegal immigrants landing in the United States who require expensive social services lead some people to conclude that they should be sent home. Other people may conclude that immigrants should be allowed to stay. No matter which claim or conclusion is chosen, it can be stated at the beginning or at the end of the paper. The only requirement is that it be based on the examples. The same transitional words used for the deductive pattern are also useful for the inductive: *for instance*, *for example*, or *some examples* to emphasize the examples; *therefore*, *thus*, or *consequently* to lead into the claim.

Comparison and Contrast

This pattern is particularly useful in definition arguments and in other arguments that show how a subject is like or unlike similar subjects. It is also often used to demonstrate a variety of similarities or differences. For example, the claim is made that drug abuse is a medical problem instead of a criminal justice problem. The proof consists of literal analogies that compare drug abuse to AIDS, cancer, and heart disease to redefine it as a medical problem. The transitional words *by contrast*, *in comparison*, *while*, *some*, and *others* are sometimes used to clarify the ideas in this pattern.