

# **ORGANIZATION: making it flow from start to finish**

## ***A Writing Center Workshop***

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### **Part One: Global Organization**

**To know how to organize a writing assignment, you have to**

- **Understand what the assignment is asking you to do** (see handout, “How to Read an Assignment”)
- **Know your *rhetorical situation***

#### *Determining Your Rhetorical Situation*

What is your purpose in this project? What do you intend to accomplish?

Who is your audience? How much does your audience know about your subject? What are likely to be your audience’s opinions about your subject?

How, in your writing, can you appear knowledgeable about your subject?

How can you show that you have kept your audience’s needs in mind?

What do you want your reader to take away from the experience of reading your paper?

- **Explore your ideas and their relationships thoroughly before you draft**
- **Reorganize after you draft—sometimes over and over again**

**Strategies for organizing your ideas are useful throughout your writing process**

- **exploring your subject initially**
- **putting the first draft together**
- **reorganizing your draft during revision**

No one size fits all, though, since we all have different ways of approaching the writing process. The best approach is to try different strategies to see which one works best for you and for the assignment you’re working on. Here are some strategies to try:

## **1. SENTENCE OUTLINE**

(from [http://grassroots.brunnet.net/ohs/student\\_handbook9/TheEssay.htm#15namedanchor](http://grassroots.brunnet.net/ohs/student_handbook9/TheEssay.htm#15namedanchor))

The **sentence outline** contains not only the major points to be covered in a paper, but also lists many of the important supporting details. Each point must be written in a complete sentence.

### **Example of a sentence outline**

I. Africa is a land of many valuable resources.

A. It contains great areas of unused land, water and minerals.

B. There are enough resources to feed all of Africa.

C. Developing these resources will take time, because many African countries are not very strong.

II. India should give African countries hope.

A. They experienced a similar hunger problem.

B. The government planned for self-sufficiency and began producing enough food for its people.

C. India is in much better shape than it was 25 years ago.

- III. A group of agricultural officials produced the "Harare Declaration".
- A. This declaration promises self-sufficiency in Africa.
  - B. This declaration also unified many African countries.
  - C. Somalia is helping starving refugees from Ethiopia.

## 2. REVERSE OUTLINING

(#2-#6 adapted from "Reorganizing your draft"

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/organization.html>)

**Let's say your paper is about Huckleberry Finn, and your working thesis is: "In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore." You feel uncertain if your paper really follows through on the thesis as promised.**

This paper may benefit from **reverse outlining**, in order to help it realize its promising thesis. Your aim is to create an outline of what you've already written, as opposed to the kind of outline that you make before you begin to write. The reverse outline will help you evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of both your organization and your argument.

- Read the draft and take notes (in margin, note what each paragraph is trying to accomplish)
- Outline the draft
- Examine the outline (look for repetition and other organizational problems)
- Reexamine the thesis, outline and draft together (Look closely at the outline and see how well it supports the argument in your thesis statement.)

**The result of reverse outlining:** You should be able to see which paragraphs need rewriting, reordering or rejecting. You may find some paragraphs are tangential or irrelevant to the focus of your argument or that some paragraphs have more than one idea and need reworking.

## 3. TALKING IT OUT

**Let's say you're writing about Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, and your working thesis is: "The New Deal was actually a conservative defense of American capitalism."**

This strategy forces you to explain your thinking to someone else.

- **Find a friend, your professor, a relative, a Writing Center tutor, or any sympathetic and intelligent listener.**

Since we are more accustomed to talking than to writing, the ways we explain things out loud often makes more sense both to us and to our audience than when we first write them down.

- **Explain What Your Paper Is About**

Pay attention to how you explain your argument verbally. Chances are that the order in which you present your ideas and evidence to your listener is a logical way to arrange them in your paper. Let's

say that you begin (as you did above) with the working thesis. As you continue to explain, you realize that even though your draft doesn't mention "private enterprise" until the last two paragraphs, you begin to talk about it right away. This fact should tell you that you probably need to discuss private enterprise near the beginning.

- **Take Notes**

You and your listener should keep track of the way you explain your paper. You probably won't remember it all if you don't, and then you'll just rely on what you've already written. Compare the structure of the argument in the notes to the structure of the draft you've written.

- **Get Your Listener to Ask Questions**

As the writer, it is in your interest to receive constructive criticism so that your draft will become stronger. You want your listener to say things like, "Would you mind explaining that point about being both conservative and liberal again? I wasn't sure I followed" or "What kind of economic principle is government relief? Is it communist? Archaic? Ridiculous?" Questions you can't answer may signal an unnecessary tangent or an area needing further development in the draft. Questions you need to think about will probably make you realize that you need to explain more in your paper.

**Result of the *Talk it Out* strategy:** In short, you want to know that your listener fully understands you; if not, chances are your readers won't either.

## **4. COMPARE AND CONTRAST**

**Let's say you're writing a history paper, and your working thesis is this: "Although both sides fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons while the South fought to preserve its own institutions."**

What might be giving you trouble with organization is that you've created some very broad categories to work with (slavery, morality, institutions). They're all relevant to the Civil War, but there's only so much you can do in a three-, five-, or even ten-page paper. If you look more closely, you can narrow your argument by finding more specific terms; narrowing your argument will, in turn, help you rethink your organization.

In a compare and contrast paper, where you distinguish between and explain two sides of an issue, **listing** can help clarify both the organization and the argument.

- **Make a list**

As you can see, some of the issues pertain to both sides and some just to one or the other. Thus, the listing process should relatively quickly confirm whether the draft obeys the argument laid out in the working thesis.

- **Re-examine the thesis**

The revised thesis offers more specifics, which should help you organize your draft more successfully by narrowing the scope.

- **Re-examine the draft's general structure**

From the list and the revised thesis statement, is it best to discuss similarities first and then explain the differences or the other way around? Be sure your overall start-to-finish structure is in line with the message you intend to convey.

- **Reorganize the argument**

You still need to ask yourself which points are most important. The order in which you present your points generally reflects a hierarchy of significance for your readers to follow.

**(For detailed guidance on writing comparison/contrast essays, see the handout, “compare and contrast advice”)**

## **5. SECTIONING**

**Let's say you're working on a paper in which you argue for euthanasia on the grounds that it reflects humane values, respects individual autonomy, and reduces needless costs.**

**Sectioning** works particularly well for long papers where you will be contending with a number of ideas and a complicated argument. It's also useful if you are having difficulty distinguishing between the goals of each paragraph.

- **Put Paragraphs under Section Headings**

Your argument has three categories of support. Put each of your paragraphs into one of the three categories: values, autonomy, and costs. If any paragraph, beyond the introduction or conclusion, fits into two categories or all three, you may need to look at your paragraph development. (See “Special Topics- Writing Good Paragraphs,” near the end of this workshop document.) If some paragraphs don't fit any category, then they probably don't belong in the paper.

- **Re-examine each Section**

Assuming you have more than one paragraph under each section, try to distinguish between them. For example, under "Humane Values" you might have placed an argument in favor of and a counterargument (with which you presumably strengthen your position). Or perhaps you have two arguments in favor of that can be distinguished from each other by author, logic, ethical principles invoked, etc. **Write down the distinctions -- they will help you formulate clear topic sentences. If the distinctions can only be made within paragraphs themselves -- for example, one paragraph presents two arguments and one counterargument -- you probably need to revisit paragraph development.**

- **Re-examine the Entire Argument**

Which section do you want to appear first? Why? Which Second? Why? In what order should the paragraphs appear in each section? And so on. Look for an order that makes the strongest possible argument.

## **6. VISUALIZING**

Many people find that a visual brainstorming technique called clustering, mapping, or webbing is a good tool for rethinking a draft's organization. (See also the handouts "Making an Idea Map" and "Organizing ideas visually for planning and revising.")

### **Part Two: Local Organization** **The Magic of Transitions**

***How do you know if you're ready to work on local organization?***

- *Test:* In the margins of your draft, summarize in a word or short phrase what each paragraph is about or how it fits into your analysis as a whole. Use complete sentences to do this. This exercise should help you to see the order of and connection between your ideas more clearly. If after doing this exercise you find that you still have difficulty linking your ideas together in a coherent fashion, your problem may not be with transitions but with organization. If so, you should return to one of the organizing strategies listed above.

**Unless you've worked hard to craft an overall organization for your essay, you might as well not even start looking at solving transition problems. However, sometimes assessing your transitions (or lack of them) helps you in figuring out the overall organization.**

#### ***The Function and Importance of Transitions***

(adapted from <http://www.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/transitions.html>)

- **nails holding the structure together**
- **logical glue**
- **road signs for readers**
- **bridges over troubled waters**

Transitions are not just "window dressing" to embellish your paper by making it sound or read better. Transitions establish logical connections between sentences, paragraphs, and sections of your papers. In other words, transitions tell readers what to do with the information you present them. **Whether single words, quick phrases or full sentences, they function as signs for readers that tell them how to think about, organize, and react to old and new ideas as they read through what you have written.**

Basically, transitions provide the reader with directions for how to piece together your ideas into a logically coherent argument. They are words with particular meanings that tell the reader to think and react in a particular way to your ideas.

### ***How Transitions Work***

**The organization of your written work includes two elements:**

- (1) the order of parts of your discussion or argument, and**
- (2) the relationships you construct between these parts.**

Transitions cannot substitute for good organization, but they can make this organization clearer and easier to follow. The following example should help to make this point clear.

*El Pais, a Latin American country, has a new democratic government after having been a dictatorship for many years. Assume that you want to argue that El Pais is not as democratic as the conventional view would have us believe. One way to effectively organize your argument would be to present the conventional view and then to provide the reader with your critical response to this view. So, in Paragraph A you would want to enumerate all the reasons that someone might consider El Pais highly democratic, while in Paragraph B you would want to refute these points. The transition that would establish the logical connection between these two key elements of your argument would indicate to the reader that the information in paragraph B contradicts the information in paragraph A. As a result, you might organize your argument, including the transition that links paragraph A with paragraph B, in the following manner:*

***Paragraph A:*** points in support of the view that El Pais's new government is very democratic.

***Transition:*** Despite the previous arguments, there are many reasons to think that El Pais's new government is not as democratic as typically believed.

***Paragraph B:*** points that contradict the view that El Pais's new government is very democratic.

*In this case, the transition words "Despite the previous arguments," suggest that the reader should not believe paragraph A and instead should consider the writer's reasons for viewing El Pais's democracy as suspect in the upcoming paragraph.*

**As the previous example suggests, transitions can help reinforce the underlying logic of your paper's organization by providing the reader with essential information regarding the relationship between your ideas. In this way, transitions act as the glue that binds the components of your argument or discussion into a unified, coherent, and persuasive whole.**

## Types of Transitions

**A transition can be a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire paragraph.** In each case it functions the same way: first, the transition either directly summarizes the content of a preceding sentence, paragraph, or section, or it implies that summary. Then it helps the reader anticipate or comprehend the new information that you wish to present.

1. **Transitions between Sections**--Particularly in longer works, it may be necessary to include transitional paragraphs that summarize for the reader the information just covered and specify the relevance of this information to the discussion in the following section.
2. **Transitions between Paragraphs**--If you have done a good job of arranging paragraphs so that the content of one leads logically to the next, the transition will highlight a relationship that already exists by summarizing the previous paragraph and suggesting something of the content of the paragraph that follows. A transition between paragraphs can be a word or two (*however, for example, similarly*), a phrase, or a sentence.
3. **Transitions within Paragraphs**--As with transitions between sections and paragraphs, transitions within paragraphs act as cues by helping readers to anticipate what is coming before they read it. Within paragraphs, transitions tend to be single words or short phrases.

**Effectively constructing each transition often depends upon your ability to identify words or phrases that will indicate for the reader the kind of logical relationships you want to convey.**

Look in the left column of the table for the kind of logical relationship you are trying to express. Then look in the right column of the table for examples of words or phrases that express this logical relationship.

<b>Similarity</b>	also, in the same way, just as ... so too, likewise, similarly
<b>Exception/Contrast</b>	but, however, in spite of, on the one hand ... on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, in contrast, on the contrary, still, yet
<b>Sequence/Order</b>	first, second, third, ... next, then, finally
<b>Time</b>	after, afterward, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, immediately, later, meanwhile, now, recently, simultaneously, subsequently, then
<b>Example</b>	for example, for instance, namely, specifically, to illustrate

<b>Emphasis</b>	even, indeed, in fact, of course, truly
<b>Place/Position</b>	above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there
<b>Cause and Effect</b>	accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus
<b>Additional Support or Evidence</b>	additionally, again, also, and, as well, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then
<b>Conclusion/Summary</b>	finally, in a word, in brief, in conclusion, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, thus, to conclude, to summarize, in sum, in summary

### *More Transitional words and phrases*

(From <http://lovecraft.cwrl.utexas.edu/virgil/?q=node/129>)

**"to prove":** *consequently, thus, therefore*

**"to show relationships in time":** *first, second, third, finally, then*

### **Example of transitions in everyday communication**

*Hey Mom, I have a problem. First (relationship in time), my car broke down. Then (relationship in time), I had to pay late fees at Vulcan Video. Also (to add), I really hate cafeteria food, so I eat at Jack in the Box everyday. I do, however (to contrast), save cash by drinking at bars only when they have specials. For example (to give an example), a beer at the Dog and Duck on Tuesdays is only \$2; normally it's \$4! In conclusion (to summarize), I need more money. I think my efforts to save money by finding beer specials and buying my Playstation on sale should prove my financial responsibility. Therefore (to prove), you should send me large amounts of cash via Western Union—it's the fastest way to send money. Please send the money soon, since it is almost Tuesday. Thanks, Virgil.*

## **Part Three: Special Topics**

### **Using Quotations Effectively**

**You severely reduce your credibility when you misuse and incorrectly cite quotations, and when you rely too heavily on quoted materials. In addition, poorly integrated quotations interfere with your reader's understanding of your ideas. Here is a guide for analyzing your use of quotations to make sure that they are not interrupting your logical flow.**

After you have written a draft, review each of the quotations you have drawn from outside sources. For each one, answer the following questions.

1. Why have you used this quotation?
2. Is it necessary that you *quote* from this source, or can you simply paraphrase? (Overusing quoted material harms your credibility. Only quote when the author's exact words are as important to your argument as the information that he or she conveys.)
3. **Have you introduced the quotation effectively? Have you explained its significance? (Remember: the importance of a quotation is *never* self-evident. It is your job to explain to readers what each quotation says and why it is important.)**
4. Have you worked the quotation seamlessly into your prose?
5. Have you presented the quotation as persuasively as possible?
  - Can you draw on the author's qualifications (e.g., "National Book Award winner Nicholson Baker writes . . .")?
  - Can you draw on the reputation of the journal or newspaper (e.g., "As one critic writes in *The New York Times* . . .")?
  - Can you emphasize the quotation's timeliness (e.g., "The most recent study, published only four months ago, notes that . . .")?
6. Have you cited the source responsibly?
  - Is it perfectly clear which language is yours and which comes from the source you're quoting?
  - Does the quotation fairly represent the source from which it is drawn?
  - Has your instructor asked that you turn in copies of your sources? If so, do you have a copy of each source to turn in with your assignment?
7. Has your instructor specified that you format your citations according to a particular style (e.g., MLA, COS, CMS, APA)? If so, have you used that style in all of your citations?

# Writing Good Paragraphs

## Assessing your paragraphs

For each of your body paragraphs, answer the following questions:

- What is this paragraph's purpose in the paper?
- Is this paragraph organized according to one of the strategies for organizing paragraphs listed in *Easy Access*? If so, which one?
- Is the organizational strategy you have employed appropriate to the purpose of the paragraph? Why?
- Does this paragraph need to be revised for organization in some way? If so, how?

## Crafting Perfect Paragraphs—a step by step example

(Adapted from UNC's Writing Center website)

**In short, good paragraphs have a controlling idea, explanation of that idea, examples to illustrate/prove the idea, explanation of the examples, completion of the paragraph's idea, transition into the next idea.**

**1. CONTROLLING IDEA-** the expression of the main idea, topic, or focus of the paragraph in a sentence or a collection of sentences.

- Paragraph development begins with the formulation of the controlling idea. This idea directs the paragraph's development. Often, the controlling idea of a paragraph will appear in the form of a topic sentence. A topic sentence announces and controls the content of a paragraph. Topic sentences can occur at four major points in a paragraph: the beginning of the paragraph, the middle of the paragraph, the end of the paragraph, or at both the beginning and the end of the paragraph. Here's how you might begin a paragraph on handing in homework:

***IDEA** - Learning how to turn in homework assignments on time is one of the invaluable skills that college students can take with them into the working world.*

**2. EXPLANATION OF CONTROLLING IDEA-** the writer's rationale into his/her thinking about the main topic, idea, or focus of the paragraph

- Paragraph development continues with an expression of the rationale or the explanation that the writer gives for how the reader should interpret the information presented in the idea statement or topic sentence of the paragraph. Here's the sentence that would follow the controlling idea about homework deadlines:

***EXPLANATION** - Though the workforce may not assign homework to its workers in the traditional sense, many of the objectives and jobs that need to be completed require that employees work with deadlines. The deadlines that students encounter in the classroom may be different in content when compared to the deadlines of the workforce, but the importance of meeting those deadlines is the same. In fact, failure to meet deadlines in both the classroom and the workforce can mean instant termination.*

**3. EXAMPLE** -- the example serves as a sign or representation of the relationship established in the idea and explanation portions of the paragraph

- Paragraph development progresses with the expression of some type of support or evidence for the idea and the explanation that came before it. Here are two examples that you might use to follow the homework deadline explanation:

**EXAMPLE A**--*For example, in the classroom, students form a contract with the teacher and the university when they enroll in a class. That contract requires that students complete the assignments and objectives set forth by the course's instructor in a specified time to receive a grade and credit for the course.*

**EXAMPLE B**--*Accordingly, just as a student risks termination in the classroom if he/she fails to meet the deadline for a homework assignment, so, too, does that student risk termination in the workforce.*

**4. EXPLANATION (of EXAMPLE)** - the reasoning behind why you chose to use this/or these particular examples as evidence to support the major claim, or focus, in your paragraph.

- The next movement in paragraph development is an explanation of each example and its relevance to the topic sentence and rationale given at the beginning of the paragraph. This pattern continues until all points/examples that the reader deems necessary have been made and explained. NONE of your examples should be left unexplained; the relationship between the example and the idea should always be expressed. Look at these two explanations for examples in the homework deadline paragraph:

**EXPLANATION FOR EXAMPLE A**--*When a student fails to complete those assignments by the deadline, the student breaks her contract with the university and the teacher to complete the assignments and objectives of the course. This often leaves the teacher with no recourse than to fail the student and leaves the university with no other recourse than to terminate the student's credit for the course.*

**EXPLANATION FOR EXAMPLE B**--*A former student's contract with his/her employer functions in much the same way as the contract that student had with his/her instructor and with the university in a particular course.*

**5. COMPLETION OF PARAGRAPH'S IDEA OR TRANSITION INTO NEXT PARAGRAPH**-- a review for your reader about the relevance of the information that you just discussed in the paragraph, or a transition or preparation for your reader for the paragraph that follows.

- The final movement in paragraph development involves tying up the loose ends of the paragraph--and reminding the reader of the relevance of the information in this paragraph to the main or controlling idea of the paper. You might feel more comfortable, however, simply transitioning your reader to the next development in the next paragraph. Here's an example of a sentence that completes the homework deadlines paragraph:

**IDEA**--*Developing good habits of turning in assignments in class now, as current students, will aid your performance and position as future participants in the working world.*

***Notice that the example and explanation steps of this model (steps 3 and 4) can be repeated as needed. The idea is that you continue to use this pattern until you have completely developed the main idea of the paragraph.***

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## **OTHER HELP**

***Easy Access*** pp. 26-33 offers information about ways to develop paragraphs, organize your writing, and use transitions

### **Websites for help**

- <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/organization.html> **Link to a website of handouts and links on many writing topics.**
- <http://lovecraft.cwrl.utexas.edu/virgil/?q=node/129> **Guidelines for assembling an essay with links to sample structures and help with transitions**
- **For help on comparison/contrast assignments, in addition to the UNC advice:**

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/CompAnalysis.html>

<http://depts.washington.edu/pswrite/compare.html>

<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/comparcontrast.html>