

Organizing

Analyzing essay organizational techniques

The article “The Advantages of Organizational Skills” by Alexis Writing lists several virtues of being organized:

- Efficiency
- Tracking Progress
- Better Management Skills
- Instilling Trust
- Reduced Stress (Writing, Alexis. "The Advantages of Organizational Skills." *Chron.* 2016. Web. 1 Jun 2016.)

The article is actually referring to small business ownership, but the same advantages absolutely apply when considering organization as a principle of the writing process.

Let’s consider each of these virtues in closer detail:

Efficiency

Mapping out a plan for essay development requires some up-front time, but pays huge dividends in saving time later. As with many of the early stages of the writing process, deliberation now will be a huge advantage later.

Tracking Progress

Sub-dividing a writing project into smaller components is a great time management strategy. It’s easy to see the progress you’re making in the overall task, and helps you keep track of how much time will be needed to see the project through to completion.

Better Management Skills

Just like following a roadmap of your essay plan will save and track time, it will also save and track other resources—namely, the energy you need to invest in further research, getting input from peers, tutors, or instructors, and how to balance other commitments you have for other classes and other aspects of life.

Instilling Trust

Mapping out an outline or development plan for your essay DOES instill trust—primarily, trust in yourself that this is a manageable task ahead of you. Breaking a large project into smaller

components shows a clear path towards checking items off the list. Accomplishing each stage will give you that much more confidence to approach the next one.

Video: Evolution of the Thesis Statement

Previous pages established the importance of a working thesis statement early in the writing process. This working thesis is likely to be revisited and revised several times as the writing process continues.

After gathering evidence, and before starting to write the essay itself, is a natural point to look again at the project's thesis statement. The following video offers friendly, appealing advice for developing a thesis statement more concretely.

Types of Essays and Suggested Structures

Introduction

The structural organization of an essay will vary, depending on the type of writing task you've been assigned. Below are outline templates for specific types of writing projects. Keep in mind these are just a starting point: there is always room for variation and creativity in how a subject is most effectively presented to a reader.

Analytical essay

This is perhaps the most common structure. Examples of this include questions which ask you to *discuss, analyze, investigate, explore, or review*. In an analytical structure you are required to break the topic into its different components and discuss these in separate paragraphs or sections, demonstrating balance where possible.

1.
 1. Introduction
 -
 - Background information on topic
 - Overall point of view of the topic (thesis)
 - Overview of components to be discussed (structure)
 2. Body paragraphs
 -
 - paragraph 1
 1. Topic sentence outlining first component
 2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to support topic sentence
 3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
 - paragraph 2
 1. Topic sentence outlining second component

2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to back topic sentence
3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
- Following body paragraphs
 1. These follow the same structure for as many components as you need to outline
3. Conclusion
 -
 - Summary of the main points of the body
 - Restatement of the main point of view
 - Justification/evaluation (if required by task)

Argumentative essay

Examples of this type of essay include questions which ask you to take a position on a topic, such as a particular decision or policy, and present arguments which support your position. An effective way to argue a point can be to present the opposing view first then counter this view with stronger evidence.

1.
 1. Introduction
 -
 - Background information on topic
 - Statement of your position on the topic (thesis)
 - Overview of arguments to be presented (structure)
 2. Body paragraphs
 -
 - paragraph 1
 1. Topic sentence outlining first argument
 2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to support topic sentence
 3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
 - paragraph 2
 1. Topic sentence outlining second argument
 2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to back topic sentence
 3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
 - Following body paragraphs
 1. These follow the same structure for as many arguments as you wish to put forward in support of the topic.
 3. Conclusion
 -
 - Summary of the main points of the body
 - Restatement of the position

Interpretive essay

Examples of this type of essay include assignments where you are given data such as a case study or scenario, a diagram, graphical information, or a picture and expected to interpret this information to demonstrate your application of knowledge when answering the task. Based on this data, you may be asked to do a range of things such as provide recommendations or solutions, develop a nursing care plan, a teaching plan, suggest legal advice, or plan a marketing strategy.

1.

1. Introduction

-
- Brief background information on topic
- Overview of issues to be addressed in the essay (structure)
- State overall interpretation (thesis)

2. Body paragraphs

-
- paragraph 1
 1. Topic sentence outlining first issue identified from the data
 2. Sentences giving further explanation and providing evidence from both the literature and the data, e.g. the case study to support the topic sentence (it is very important in this types of essays to make reference to the data you have been supplied to give your essay context).
 3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
- paragraph 2
 1. Topic sentence outlining second issue identified
 2. As above
 3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
- Following body paragraphs
 1. These follow the same structure for as many issues as you wish to discuss from the data you have been supplied.

3. Conclusion

-
- Statement of overall interpretation
- Summary of the main issues from the data supplied
- Make recommendations or suggest solutions to address the issues arising from the data supplied.

Comparative essay

Examples of this type of essay include *compare*, *compare and contrast*, or *differentiate* questions. In this structure the similarities and/or differences between two or more items (for example, theories or models) are discussed paragraph by paragraph. Your assignment task may require you to make a recommendation about the suitability of the items you are comparing.

1.

1. Introduction

- - Brief background information on topic
 - Outline of two (or more) things being compared or contrasted
 - Purpose for making the comparison / contrast
 - Overview of the specific points to be compared / contrasted
2. Body paragraphs
- - paragraph 1
 1. Topic sentence outlining first similarity or difference
 2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to support topic sentence
 3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
 - paragraph 2
 1. Topic sentence outlining second similarity or different
 2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to back topic sentence
 3. Concluding sentence – link to next paragraph
 - Following body paragraphs
 1. These follow the same structure for as many items or aspects as you need to compare/contrast
3. Conclusion
- - Restatement of the main purpose for the comparison / contrast
 - Summary of the main similarities and differences
 - Recommendation about suitability of compared items for purpose (if requirement of assessment task)
 - Overall conclusion

Problem and solution essay

These essay questions often require you to structure your answer in several parts. An example may be to ask you to investigate a problem and explore a range of solutions. You may also be asked to choose the best solution and justify your selection, so allow space for this in your essay if needed.

1.
 1. Introduction
 -
 - Background information about the problem
 - Description of the problem and why it is serious
 - Overview of the solutions to be outlined
 2. Body paragraphs
 -
 - paragraph 1
 1. Topic sentence outlining first solution

2. Explanation of the positive and negative aspects of the solution
 3. Evidence to support explanations
 4. Concluding sentence
 - paragraph 2
 1. Topic sentence outlining second solution
 2. Explanation of the positive and negative aspects of the solution
 3. Evidence to support explanation
 4. Concluding sentence
 - Following body paragraphs
 1. These follow the same structure for as many solutions as you need to discuss
3. Conclusion
- - Summary of the problem and overview of the solutions
 - Evaluation of solutions and recommendation of best option

Note: Depending on the topic, body paragraphs in a problem and solution essay could be devoted to discussing the problem in more detail, as well as the solution. It's up to the writer to assess the needs of the project, in order to decide how much time is spent on each part.

Cause and effect essay

Examples of this type of essay include questions which ask you to state or investigate the effects or outline the causes of the topic. This may be, for example, an historical event, the implementation of a policy, a medical condition, or a natural disaster. These essays may be structured in one of two ways: either the cause(s) of a situation may be discussed first followed by the effect(s), or the effect(s) could come first with the discussion working back to outline the cause(s). Sometimes with cause and effect essays you are required to give an assessment of the overall effects, such as on a community, a workplace, an individual. Space must be allocated for this assessment in your structure if needed.

1.
 1. Introduction
 -
 - Background information on situation under discussion
 - Description of the situation
 - Overview of the causes or effects to be outlined
 2. Body paragraphs
 -
 - paragraph 1
 1. Topic sentence outlining first cause or effect
 2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to support the topic sentence
 3. Concluding sentence – linking to next paragraph

- paragraph 2
 1. Topic sentence outlining second cause or effect
 2. Sentences giving explanations and providing evidence to back topic sentence
 3. Concluding sentence – linking to next paragraph
 - Following body paragraphs
 1. These follow the same structure for as many causes or effects as you need to outline
3. Conclusion
- - Summary of the main points of the body
 - Conclusion, prediction or recommendation

Conclusion

Finally, consider that some essay assignments may ask you to combine approaches, especially in more advanced classes. At that point, you may have to vary your body paragraph strategy from section to section.

This chart gives an idea of what different roles paragraphs can play in a mixed-structure essay assignment.

Paragraph Structure

The paragraph is the building block of essay writing. The word itself, according to the *Oxford Dictionary Online* (2015), is defined as “a distinct section of a piece of writing, usually dealing with a single theme and indicated by a new line, indentation, or numbering.”

Paragraphs can be shown through breaks between lines or through indentations of the first line of the paragraph. Paragraphs are important for ease of reading; they help to offer ideas in “chunks” that the eye and brain can more easily comprehend (as opposed to offering information in one large block of text, which is hard to read).

Paragraphs are necessary in academic writing to show changes in ideas or further development of ideas. In academic writing, paragraphs present mini ideas that often develop out of the thesis sentence’s main idea.

Example

Thesis Sentence

A regular exercise regimen creates multiple benefits, both physical and emotional.

Beginnings of Paragraphs

- One physical benefit of having a regular exercise regimen is longevity. Recent studies have shown that . . .
- Exercise reduces heart and cholesterol rates when done at least three times per week . . .
- Another physical benefit of regular exercise is that it results in stronger heart and lungs . . .
- People who exercise regularly have less trouble with sleep disorders . . .
- A benefit that spans the physical and emotional results of regular exercise is the release of endorphins, or substances produced by glands as a byproduct of exercise . . .
- In multiple studies, regular exercise has been shown to reduce stress . . .
- Because regular exercise often helps to slow the effects of aging and maintain a good body weight, people who exercise regularly experience the emotional benefits of good self-image and self-confidence in their looks . . .

Although all of these paragraph beginnings are related to the main idea of benefits of exercise, they all show a slight shift in content, as the writer moves from one benefit to another.

Topic Sentences

In academic writing, many paragraphs or groups of paragraphs start with topic sentences, which are like mini-thesis statements. Topic sentences are idea indicators, or “signs” that help guide a reader along from idea to idea.

Topic sentences have a topic and an angle, just like thesis sentences. But the angle of topic sentences usually is smaller in range than that of the thesis sentence. Very often the topic remains the same from thesis to topic sentence, while the angle shifts as the writer brings in various types of ideas and research to support the angle in the thesis.

Look at this sample again; these are topic sentences created from the thesis sentence. The topic remains the same in all (regular exercise) and the overall angle remains the same (benefits). But the angle narrows and shifts slightly from topic sentence to topic sentence as the writer brings in different supporting ideas and research.

Thesis Sentence

A regular exercise regime creates multiple benefits, both physical and emotional.

Topic Angle

Regular Physical and
exercise emotional benefits

Topic Sentence

Topic Angle

One physical benefit of having a regular exercise regime is longevity. Recent studies have shown that...	Regular exercise	Physical benefit of longevity
Exercise reduces heart and cholesterol rates when done at least three times per week...	Regular exercise	Physical benefit of reduced cholesterol
Another physical benefit of regular exercise is that it results in stronger heart and lungs...	Regular exercise	Physical benefit of stronger heart and lungs
People who exercise regularly have less trouble with sleep disorders...	Regular exercise	Physical benefit of less trouble sleeping
A benefit that spans the physical and emotional results of regular exercise is the release of endorphins, or substances produced by glands as a byproduct of exercise...	Regular exercise	Physical and emotional benefits of endorphins
In multiple studies, regular exercise has been shown to reduce stress...	Regular exercise	Emotional benefit of reduced stress
Because regular exercise often helps to slow the effects of aging and maintain a good body weight, people who exercise regularly experience the emotional benefits of good self-image and self-confidence in their looks...	Regular exercise	Emotional benefit of better self-image & confidence

Realize that all paragraphs do not need topic sentences. Sometimes, you may need multiple paragraphs to help explain one topic sentence, because you have a lot of supporting information.

When to Paragraph

How do you know when “enough is enough”—when you have enough information in one paragraph and have to start a new one? A very rough guide is that you need more than one or two paragraphs per page of type. Paragraphing conventions online require even shorter paragraphs, with multiple short paragraphs on one screen.

It’s best to deal with paragraphs as part of the revision step in the writing process. Find places where the information shifts in focus, and put paragraph breaks in those places. You can do your best to paragraph as you draft but know you’ll address paragraphing more during the revision process.

Linking Paragraphs: Transitions

Transitions are words or phrases that indicate linkages in ideas. When writing, you need to lead your readers from one idea to the next, showing how those ideas are logically linked. Transition words and phrases help you keep your paragraphs and groups of paragraphs logically connected for a reader. Writers often check their transitions during the revising stage of the writing process.

Here are some example transition words to help as you transition both within paragraphs and from one paragraph to the next.

Transition Word / Phrase:	Shows:
and, also, again	More of the same type of information is coming; information expands on the same general idea.
but, or, however, in contrast	Different information is coming, information that may counteract what was just said.
as a result, consequently, therefore	Information that is coming is a logical outgrowth of the ideas just presented.
for example, to illustrate	The information coming will present a specific instance, or present a concrete example of an abstract idea.
particularly important, note that	The information coming emphasizes the importance of an idea.
in conclusion	The writing is ending.

Toulmin's Schema

Another approach to writing assignments, particularly ones with a persuasive or argumentative aspect to them, is to apply what's known as Toulmin's Schema as you prepare to write. Rather than a strict outline for a persuasive essay, Toulmin's Schema asks you to identify key features of your argument ahead of time, and understand how they will influence both what you write, and how your audience will react to what you write.

Toulmin's Schema is named for Stephen Edelston Toulmin (born March 25, 1922), a British philosopher, author, and educator devoted to analyzing moral reasoning. Throughout his writings, he seeks to develop practical arguments which can be used effectively in evaluating the ethics behind moral issues. His most famous work is his Model of Argumentation (also known as Toulmin's Schema), which is a method of analyzing an argument by breaking it down into six parts. Once an argument is broken down and examined, weaknesses in the argument can be found and addressed.

Toulmin's Schema

1. **Claim:** conclusions whose merit must be established. For example, if a person tries to convince a listener that he is a British citizen, the claim would be "I am a British citizen."

2. **Data:** the facts appealed to as a foundation for the claim. For example, the person introduced in 1 can support his claim with the supporting data “I was born in Bermuda.”
3. **Warrant:** the statement authorizing the movement from the data to the claim. In order to move from the data established in 2, “I was born in Bermuda,” to the claim in 1, “I am a British citizen,” the person must supply a warrant to bridge the gap between 1 & 2 with the statement “A man born in Bermuda will legally be a British citizen.” Toulmin stated that an argument is only as strong as its weakest warrant and if a warrant isn’t valid, then the whole argument collapses. Therefore, it is important to have strong, valid warrants.
4. **Backing:** facts that give credibility to the statement expressed in the warrant; backing must be introduced when the warrant itself is not convincing enough to the readers or the listeners. For example, if the listener does not deem the warrant as credible, the speaker would supply legal documents as backing statement to show that it is true that “A man born in Bermuda will legally be a British citizen.”
5. **Rebuttal:** statements recognizing the restrictions to which the claim may legitimately be applied. The rebuttal is exemplified as follows, “A man born in Bermuda will legally be a British citizen, unless he has betrayed Britain and become a spy of another country.”
6. **Qualifier:** words or phrases expressing how certain the author/speaker is concerning the claim. Such words or phrases include “possible,” “probably,” “impossible,” “certainly,” “presumably,” “as far as the evidence goes,” or “necessarily.” The claim “I am definitely a British citizen” has a greater degree of force than the claim “I am a British citizen, presumably.”

The first three elements (claim, data, and warrant) are considered as the essential components of practical arguments, while the final three elements (qualifier, Backing, and Rebuttal) may not be needed in all arguments.

When first proposed, this Schema was based on legal arguments and intended to be used to analyze arguments typically found in the courtroom. In fact, Toulmin did not realize that this layout would be applicable to the field of rhetoric and communication until later.

Example 1

Suppose you see a one of those commercials for a product that promises to give you whiter teeth. Here are the basic parts of the argument behind the commercial:

1. **Claim:** You should buy our tooth-whitening product.
2. **Data:** Studies show that teeth are 50% whiter after using the product for a specified time.
3. **Warrant:** People want whiter teeth.
4. **Backing:** Celebrities want whiter teeth.
5. **Rebuttal:** Commercial says “unless you don’t want to attract guys.”
6. **Qualifier:** Fine print says “product must be used six weeks for results.”

Notice that those commercials don’t usually bother trying to convince you that you want whiter teeth; instead, they assume that you have bought into the value our culture places on whiter teeth. When an assumption—a warrant in Toulmin’s terms—is unstated, it’s called an implicit warrant.

Sometimes, however, the warrant may need to be stated because it is a powerful part of the argument. When the warrant is stated, it's called an explicit warrant.

Example 2

1. **Claim:** People should probably own a gun.
2. **Data:** Studies show that people who own a gun are less likely to be mugged.
3. **Warrant:** People want to be safe.
4. **Backing:** May not be necessary. In this case, it is common sense that people want to be safe.
5. **Rebuttal:** Not everyone should own a gun. Children and those with mental disorders/problems should not own a gun.
6. **Qualifier:** The word "probably" in the claim.

How would you assess the strength of the warrant in this argument?

Example 3

1. **Claim:** Flag burning should be unconstitutional in most cases.
2. **Data:** A national poll says that 60% of Americans want flag burning to be unconstitutional.
3. **Warrant:** People want to respect the flag.
4. **Backing:** Official government procedures for the disposal of flags.
5. **Rebuttal:** Not everyone in the U.S. respects the flag.
6. **Qualifier:** The phrase "in most cases."

How would you assess the strength of the data in this argument?

Toulmin says that the weakest part of any argument is its weakest warrant. Remember that the warrant is the link between the data and the claim. If the warrant isn't valid, the argument collapses.