

## Patterns of Organization

Your thesis usually governs the form or forms of the essay. If your message were that a vocational education is superior to one in liberal arts for your readers, or vice versa, you would probably use the contrast form in your essay. If your thesis were that the best method of preparing soufflés is your method, you would probably explain the process and describe the result in detail. The form your essay should take is inherent in the message you want to convey.

The best form to use is not always evident immediately. With experience, though, you get better at matching form to content and purpose. Here are some specific patterns of organization that come naturally to the experienced writer. With practice, you too will use them well.

### 1. **Time Order** (moves through time)

Narrates events from introduction to conclusion. Time order is useful in many ways: to sequence a chain of events, show how a process works, explain how to perform a process, or to trace causes and effects to their ultimate end.

### 2. **Spatial Order** (moves through place, position, location)

Places things or people in relation to each other. Spatial order is vital in describing a scene, explaining the operation of a team or group who work together, or describing a technical layout of any kind. It is useful in many definitions as well.

### 3. **Breakdown Order** (moves between general and specific, abstract and concrete)

Analyzes a topic, breaking it down into its logical segments. This organizing principle is the basis for essays that analyze a body of data or classify a set of related items into categories.

### 4. **Relationship Order** (moves with similarities, differences)

Shows how one thing is related to another. This underlies comparison and contrast, analogies, and literary devices such as metaphor and simile.

These four basic organizational patterns are important. In any writing, you can impose a pattern on your thesis if you know these patterns well. Be sure that you don't let your awareness of form become a straightjacket, though. It's true that one particular pattern usually dominates in any essay, but the other patterns are useful, too. Remember that you are writing not to fit a pattern but to communicate a message to a particular person or group. Patterns are only tools to help you achieve that goal.

## Practice Exercises

### I. Write sample thesis statements for each type of organizational pattern.

A. Time Order (Example: For a successful beach party, you must carefully plan, delegate responsibilities, and follow up on assignments.)

Thesis Statements:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

B. Spatial Order (Example: For best yields and appearance, a family garden must be laid out wisely.)

Thesis Statements:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

C. Breakdown Order (Example: Even a small city requires a complex administrative structure.)

Thesis Statements:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

D. Relationship Order (Example: A moped is more practical than a bicycle for the suburban homemaker's daily transportation.)

Thesis Statements:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

II. Now review your thesis statements to determine the organizational pattern inherent in each. Indicate the order in the margin at the left of each thesis statement.

What other patterns might be useful in supporting or developing each thesis statement? For example, look at the illustration thesis statement we gave for relationship order. You would undoubtedly use mainly the comparison/contrast form, but within the essay you might also need the breakdown pattern to classify items or duties that make the moped more practical. Spatial order, too, might be useful in that essay to describe each vehicle or to explain the routes a homemaker might take on the moped or bicycle.

III. Briefly explain how each of your thesis statements could be developed by the use of patterns or orders other than the one that will control the essay.

**A. Time Order**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**B. Spatial Order**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### C. Breakdown Order

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### D. Relationship Order

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

IV. Choose several general topics and write three different thesis statements that you might use as bases for themes. Then, after each statement, indicate which pattern of organization would be the most useful in developing it. An example on the topic of baseball is supplied for you.

Topic: **Baseball**

Thesis Statements:

1. To organize a successful little league program requires the cooperation of many community groups. **Pattern:** Breakdown Order
2. Ty Cobb was a better defensive player than Lou Gehrig. **Pattern:** Relationship Order
3. To exceed Babe Ruth's home run output during his record year, a modern batter must set a strong pace early in the season and maintain it through August and September. **Pattern:** Time Order