

Structuring Your Writing

After hours of research you have some great ideas for your paper. Now all you have to do is figure out how to put them together. The way that you structure your paper can have a dramatic effect on the message you convey to your reader. Here are some common ways of structuring writing.

- **Natural:** If you find there is a natural ordering of your topics, try to use it. Don't force an awkward organization on your paper.
- **Comparison:** Begin by establishing a basis or bases for comparison (e.g. size, color, weight). Then compare your subjects aspect by aspect, with each section comparing the analogous aspects of the subjects, or subject by subject, discussing and comparing all relevant aspects of one subject before comparing the aspects of another subject.
- **Importance:** Start with the most important point and progress to the least important point. This will help keep your reader motivated through what may be less interesting material. Or, write from least to greatest importance to add weight to your most important points.
- **Cause/Effect:** This method is effective for showing causal relationships. You might first describe a cause and then reveal the process by which it produces certain effects. Or, start with the effects and then reveal the causes (good if the effects are well known, but not the causes).
- **Problem/Solution:** First argue for your problem; convince your reader that the problem exists and must be dealt with. Then provide them with a workable solution. If your problem is complex, you may wish to break it up into parts and then present a solution to each subproblem as you discuss it, although this will break up your solution and may hurt cohesion.
- **Division and Classification:** If you are writing about complex subjects, try dividing and combining them into categories and then organize your paper around these categories. Organizing by kinds will help the reader to see the connections between the ideas that you present.
- **Chronological:** Order events as they occur in time. For example, you might start by discussing what happened in the morning and finish with what happened late at night, progressing through the day sequentially.

You can also combine structures. For example, if you are writing about book publishing technology, you might lump certain techniques into categories such as human, mechanical, and computerized. Then, your next level of organization could be chronological, presenting first human, then mechanical, and finally computerized publishing techniques. Alternatively, if you want to show that mechanical printing was the most important technological change in publishing, you might choose to write about it first, followed by human and computerized publishing techniques in decreasing historical importance.

Simple Outlining Techniques

Outlining is a method for organizing ideas before writing. With it, you create a skeleton that you can build into a paper by adding meat (words). Just like the human body, your paper will fall apart if the skeleton is not strong. By outlining *before* writing, you can assess the strength of your ideas and structure and fix flaws in your thinking easily, rather than trying to fix your ideas after you've buried them in many pages of words.

Begin by writing down some relatively broad topics that your paper will address. For example, see the top level bullets in the outline to the right about Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Next, try expanding on these topics, keeping in mind your paper's focus (if you don't have a clear idea of what your focus is, go back and work on that first).

Do this for all of your topics. Once you feel like you can 'see' your paper, start trying to write the paper. If, as you're writing, something feels wrong with your content or structure, go back to the outline and try to find the problem. It's usually easier to change a few words on the outline than to rewrite hundreds of words in your paper.

Tips:

Unless you must formally present your outline, don't worry about getting the numbering right; just use visual cues to keep track of ideas.

Keep items in your outline short. Just write a few words so that you have the idea and save writing complete sentences for your paper.

When you add a level to your outline, make sure that it contains at least two points. If it contains only one point, you probably don't need that extra level.

- Title: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Introduction
 - Hook
 - Thesis
- Symptoms
 - Obsessions with
 - Cleanliness
 - Symmetry
 - Count
 - Immoral thoughts/behavior
 - Repetitive, compulsive behavior
 - In response to obsession
 - On a schedule
- Causes
 - Neurobiological basis
 - Possibly genetically inherited
 - Environment no longer considered significant
- Treatments
 - Pharmacotherapy
 - Serotonin
 - Effectiveness
 - Behavior Therapy
 - Traditional therapy ineffective
 - Exposure and response
- Conclusion