

TIPS FOR ORGANIZING YOUR PAPER

These are some tips for organizing your writing. They may be especially useful for ENGL 1100 and ENGL 1120 papers.

Identify main ideas

Make a list of all the information you are planning to include in the paper. Indicate which ideas are main and which are supporting.

Develop an outline

Once you have decided what information to include in the paper and identified the main ideas, develop an outline to show the order and hierarchy of the information. The outline can be formal or informal. It may also include topic sentences expressing main ideas. Topic sentence outlines are also useful once you have written a draft. By listing the topic sentences in your paper, you can test the logic of the organization.

Organize your information in a logical sequence

Your reader will expect the order of your paper to be logical. Two important ways for ordering information are most important to least important (or vice versa) and general to specific. Your reader should be able to easily identify the logical sequencing technique. Here are some hints about organizing common types of writing to achieve a specific purpose. That purpose should be indicated in the thesis.

Narrating. Narratives are organized around a series of events. They are often told chronologically but can be told in another sequence based on some other organizing principle, such as leaving out certain information until the end for a more powerful impact on the reader or ordering events to fit some other sort of progression.

Describing. Descriptions are organized spatially—left to right, top to bottom. Consider how you want your reader to “see” the item you are describing.

Classifying and Analyzing. These types of organization require sorting information into categories. When you have established the categories, you then will need to determine a logical sequence for discussing them—for example, most important to least important.

Comparing and Contrasting. Comparison and contrast point out the similarities and differences among items according to certain criteria. Usually the criteria for the comparison or contrast are discussed in the introduction. Then the rest of the paper can be organized in either of two ways, depending on what you want to emphasize. First, the organization can focus on the criteria. In this case, each criterion is discussed separately in relation to the items being compared and contrasted. Second, the organization can focus on the items being compared or contrasted. In this case, each item is discussed separately according to the criteria. Usually the conclusion of the paper discusses the results of the comparison and contrast.

Use transitions to indicate the relationships between paragraphs