Strategies for Revising Organization 41

TLC/College of the Canyons

Before submitting a final draft of an essay, writers should review their **organizational strategy** to make sure that it is effective. **Organization** refers to the order in which ideas appear, whether that refers to the order of paragraphs or the order of sentences in a paragraph.

Overall, the key to organizing well is thinking about the **reader's needs**. Imagine yourself reading the essay for the first time; then, work on restructuring the essay to help new readers follow your ideas.

To Begin Revising Organization:
Focus your attention on your reader's needs. Determine what information the reader will need first in order to comprehend your argument. This will involve shifting from writer-based prose (where you say what you need to say how you want to say it) to reader-based prose (where you say what you need to say how the audience wants to hear it).

Click here for an example.

What Should Go First?
Readers of essays expect to read background information early in the essay. Background information like theoretical foundations or definitions help readers understand the key ideas that rest of the essay grapples with. Therefore, they must learn about those ideas before they can follow the argument you make in your essay.

For example, if you are writing an essay about the way some companies use greenwashing to inaccurately represent their environmental practices, readers first need a definition of greenwashing. Without that definition, the reader will have a difficult time understanding the rest of your paper.

What Should Go Last?
Readers of essays expect to read strong, moving, and powerful ideas near the end of the essay. The end of the paper is your last opportunity to capture the reader's attention and convince them to accept your argument. End the paper with a bang, not a whimper.

The end of the paper is also an excellent place to consider broader implications and answer the question "so what?" In other words, why is your topic significant for the reader?

Organizational Principles:
The following principles offer options for organization. Select the principle(s) that work best for your writing style and your assignment. DO NOT try to use all organizational principles at once.

Click here for examples of each of the organizational principles.
1. **Similarity:** Keep similar ideas together. If you are writing a paper on the ways social media has changed our understanding of literacy, keep all the information about emoticons, emoji, and other visuals together.
2. **Emphasis:** Emphasize the strongest idea by placing it last. Readers are likely to remember the last thing they read best. As a writer, work on recognizing your strongest, most compelling idea and save it for the end of the paper.
3. **Chronological:** Arrange events in the order they occurred.
4. **Cause/Effect:** Begin the paper with causes and move forward to effects. This is

similar to the chronological approach because it looks at events in the order they occurred.

5. **Audience Familiarity:** Begin the paper with ideas the audience is familiar with. Then, begin introducing more unfamiliar ideas. This will help the audience understand the new, unfamiliar ideas better.

6. **Controversy:** Begin the paper with less controversial, more widely accepted ideas. Then, begin to introduce more controversial ideas. Beginning with familiar ideas will help your audience accept more controversial ideas (to an extent, of course).

7. **Problem/Solution:** Begin the paper with a discussion of a problem, and then explain how to solve the problem. The reader needs to understand that an issue is a problem they should be concerned about before they can accept your solution.

8. **Block Structure:** Work your way through a series of examples or case studies. For example, you can trace Disney Princesses' increasing independence over time by examining several films one by one.

9. **Thematic Structure:** Focus on thematic relationships between ideas. For example, if you are analyzing Disney Princesses, you can look at their relationships with parents, pathways to success, and their character development over the course of the film.

Activities to Help Writers Revise for Organization:
Often, it is easier to check for organization on a printed copy of the paper. Use tools like highlighters, scissors, glue, and sticky notes to help you move ideas around.

1. **Color Code:** Give each major idea in your paper a color. Then, on a printed copy of the paper, highlight the text to match those colors. Use the colors to help you keep similar ideas together. If necessary, cut and paste your text to bring those ideas together.

2. **Examine Paragraphs:** Each paragraph should discuss one main idea. However, sometimes students don't notice when they've introduced a new idea or if the one main idea should be split into multiple ideas. Examine your long paragraphs (one page or longer) carefully and consider ways to break them up. Slightly shorter paragraphs will help your readers focus on your ideas better.

3. **Reverse Outline:** A Reverse Outline will help you reorganize complete essays. It asks you to take an essay and go back to the outline stage. To do so, you should:
   a. Number your body paragraphs.
   b. Rewrite each of your topic sentences on a new piece of paper using the numbers of your body paragraphs (you can also use index cards or sticky notes).
   c. Reorganize the topic sentences; try several organizational strategies.
   d. When you are happy with your new organization, reorder your body paragraphs to match the new order.
   e. Review your thesis. You may have to revise the thesis based on your new organization.
   To see the reverse outline in action, [Click Here](#):

4. **Print to Reorganize:** Print out each of your body paragraphs on a different piece of paper. Then, try putting the pages in different orders to determine the best organization for your paper.

5. **Scrutinize and Delete:** Carefully review your thesis. Then, review the body of your essay to make sure *all* the paragraphs and sentences support the thesis. If you find that the writing is going off on a tangent, delete it. Although this can be difficult, it will ultimately create a stronger paper.