



# Center for Writing and Speaking

## **E** NO. 4 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

### Organizing Your Paper

*Almost as important as the information you use to prove your thesis is how you present that information — how you organize your essay. Here are a few words about organization to remember when writing and revising essays.*

#### **Thesis**

Always keep the thesis in mind. Each paragraph and each example should advance your idea and support your argument. Using the thesis as a thread that runs throughout your paper will unite and organize the ideas.

#### **Outline**

It is usually best to create an outline prior to starting the writing process. Outlines will make it easier to isolate the main ideas and determine how to arrange them.

#### **Hierarchy**

Determine which ideas are most important, which examples are the strongest, and how everything relates to the thesis. Be sure to emphasize the most important ideas and spend fewer words on less crucial parts.

#### **Relationships**

Ideas that are closely related should be near each other, in the same paragraph or adjacent paragraphs. This organization method shows connection between supporting arguments and keeps your reader from feeling like they are reading the same examples over and over.

#### **Consistency**

Be consistent in your organization. For example, if the first three points are organized chronologically, organize the rest of the essay similarly.

#### **Redundancy**

Once you prove a supporting idea in a paragraph or section, move on to the next point. Refer to earlier ideas in your paper for comparison or continuity, but don't prove the same idea in every paragraph. Each paragraph should add something new to the thesis discussion.

#### **Expectations**

The success of a well-organized paper lies in raising and meeting the reader's expectations. If you raise a question in one paragraph, the reader will expect an answer in the following paragraphs. Expectations move the reader through the essay; meeting those expectations develops the thesis.

#### **Grand finale**

Craft your essay so that the strongest ideas are near the end. Even if each paragraph contains ideas of equal importance, make sure the final section shows a culmination of all those ideas.

#### **Examples**

Think of the most effective pieces of writing you've read, or ask your professor if they have examples of good papers. Observe how these authors organized their writing, then remember those techniques for the next time you write an essay.

AGNES SCOTT