3. Essay Organization

Organization is a necessary step in the process of essay writing. This step should come after you read and understand the assignment, determine your purpose and audience, and brainstorm on the subject you have chosen to discuss.

There are a variety of ways to organize your essay:

1. **Chronological Order**—narrative essays or process analysis essays are often best organized in the order in which they occur. As its title indicates, essays written in chronological order begin at the beginning and end at the end. Many times, the minor details must be left out or combined with more major details so that the essay does not become too tedious. While occasionally referring to past events can sometimes be effective, avoid “flashbacks” if possible because they complicate the organization.

2. **Spatial Order**—while this method may not be used very often, you may consider using it in essays that describe places or objects. Your organization would be based on what you are describing: closest to farthest, top to bottom, left to right, etc. The point is that you write your description in a logical and orderly manner that allows your audience to follow your “eye” without becoming confused.

3. **Comparison**—when any essay requires you to compare/contrast elements, you have two options for logical organization.
   a. **The Divided Pattern** contains two sections: the first devoted to topic A and the second devoted to topic B. You should link the comparison by making the same number of points, putting the points in the same sequence, and discussing the points in the same depth.
   b. **The Alternating Pattern** develops the discussion through matching each of the points made about topic A and topic B. The paragraphs, then, are divided by points and each paragraph compares A with B on the given point.

4. **Cause and Effect**—when an essay asks you to analyze the causes or effects of a subject, you have three options for organization.
   a. **Describe the action or event and then demonstrate the effect.**
   b. **Describe the action or event and then determine its cause.**
   c. **Examine two related actions or events and provide a cause-and-effect connection between them.**

5. **Order of Importance**—when an essay assignment does not lend itself to any specific organizational method, you may choose to organize your topics based on their importance. Order of Importance may be effective for argumentative essays.
   a. **Most Important to Least Important**—this organizational method allows you to begin with the strongest point in your essay and to convince your audience early on.
   b. **Least Important to Most Important**—this organizational method allows you to end with the strongest point in your essay and to leave your audience with a good impression of your overall point.