

Kennesaw State University

DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University

---

Open Technical Communication

Open Educational Resources

---

7-1-2019

## 05.12: Organizing Information

Tamara Powell

*Kennesaw State University*, [tpowel25@kennesaw.edu](mailto:tpowel25@kennesaw.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/opentc>



Part of the [Technical and Professional Writing Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Powell, Tamara, "05.12: Organizing Information" (2019). *Open Technical Communication*. 37.  
<https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/opentc/37>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Educational Resources at DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Technical Communication by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

## Organizing Information

Tamara Powell

### Chapter Objective

Upon completion of this chapter, readers will be able to explain and apply common paragraph organization patterns.

# Organizing Paragraphs

Let's begin by learning more about organizing paragraphs.

This textbook has introduced you to various considerations regarding organizing information.

You need to know about a few more organizational strategies in order to have more tools in your toolbox for organizing information.

## Classification and Partition

This type of organization is often confused with chronological. Remember, just because something is divided into parts does NOT mean it is divided up by time. My favorite meal, pasta alfredo with broccoli and garlic bread (hello, carbs!) has three main parts: the entrée and two sides. The entrée is whole wheat, radiatore pasta with from-scratch alfredo sauce including fresh basil, oregano, and garlic and topped with black olives. The first side is garlic bread with a dipping sauce of olive oil, balsamic vinegar, and oregano. The second side (notice these are partitions, not chronological steps) is broccoli with salt and butter. All together, pasta alfredo with broccoli and garlic bread comprise my favorite meal. Note the meal, a single unit, is divided into parts, and each one is described. I did not tell you how to make it. I did not divide it into time components (first, you boil the pasta. Then, you mix a tablespoon of butter with a tablespoon of all purpose flour. . . ).

## Cause and Effect

Need more explanation

Beware of oversimplification. Just because two things occur in a similar time span does not mean they are linked by causation. Just because Terry was the last person to use the copy machine does not mean that Terry broke it.

## Comparisons

Need more explanation

Use part by part unless you have a good reason to use whole by whole.

## Spatial Organization

Use spatial organization to describe something physically. You might use spatial organization to explain what a fountain pen looks like, for example. You would start the description at the top of the pen, the clicker. You would move, then, along the object spatially, describing the barrel of the pen down to the writing tip. Or, you might describe the pen starting at the tip and moving to the top. You move through SPACE to describe something (the space the object occupies), so that is spatial organization. You might use the spatial pattern to describe the physical scene of an accident. Or in a feasibility study, you might use this method to describe the property upon which a proposed facility would be built.

## Chronological

A chronological description is one organized by time. Chronos is the Greek word for time. How do I cook my favorite dish? Well, first, I boil water for the radiatore pasta. Then, I mix a tablespoon of butter with a tablespoon of flour. Next, I pour a cup of heavy whipping cream (unwhipped) into a pot. After it heats up, I lower the heat and add the butter and stir

until the mixture thickens. I remove it from the heat. Next, I add garlic, parmesan cheese, and fresh basil and oregano to the mixture. As the sauce cools, I add broccoli to the steamer, add butter and salt, and steam the vegetables until tender and crisp. While the broccoli is steaming, I butter a slice of bread and grate fresh garlic over it. I place the bread in the toaster oven, and then I add the noodles to the boiling water. Finally, I pour olive oil and balsamic vinegar into a ramekin and add dried spices for dipping. Once all the cooked elements are ready, I assemble them on a plate: the noodles are topped with alfredo sauce; the bread is served with the ramekin of dipping sauce, and the broccoli is served to the side of the pasta and sauce.

## Example

Sometimes, information is organized by an example. Such a paragraph usually starts with a statement that is then clarified by the example. For example (see what I did there?)...

A third mechanism of psychological defense, "Conversion," is found in hysteria. Here the conflict is converted into the symptom of a physical illness. In a case of conversion made famous by Freud, a young woman went out for a long walk with her brother-in-law, with whom she had fallen in love. Later, on learning that her sister lay gravely ill, she hurried to her bedside. She arrived too late and her sister was dead. The young woman's grief was accompanied by sharp pain in her legs. The pain kept recurring without any apparent physical cause. Freud's explanation was that she felt guilty because she desired the husband for herself, and she unconsciously converted her repressed feelings into an imaginary physical ailment. The pain struck her in the legs because she unconsciously connected her feelings for the husband with the walk they had taken together. The ailment symbolically represented both the unconscious wish and a penance for the feelings of guilt which it engendered. (Wilson, 1964, p. 84).

## Problem-Methods-Solution

This pattern does just what it says--it describes the problem, then outlines the methods used to solve it, and then provides the solution. For example,

### The Problem

Earlier this year, we were proud to offer the industry's largest array of add-on multimedia products for both our own computers and those of other manufacturers. Our offerings in cards, CD-ROM drives, speakers, and other peripherals were unrivaled in both quantity and quality. And the response was terrific: in our first three months we sold more than 12,000 multimedia kits and 58,000 other peripheral units.

But growing pains soon became apparent: we logged more than 9,000 multi-media-related customer support calls in that same period. What was the cause of this unprecedented customer-support problem? After considerable analysis of our customer-support data, we concluded that two factors were at work: Add-on multimedia kits, even those meant for our own computers, were not necessarily compatible with the hardware or the software our customers were using. We heard too many horror stories about how the kits were installed properly, but when the customer tried to reboot, the operating system was gone.

Some 70 percent of the customers were novices, as opposed to less than 40 percent for our other product lines, and our documentation was simply inadequate to the task.

### Meeting the Challenge

We recognized that being a pioneer in the industry had its costs: we were the first to encounter the problems that are now pervasive in the industry and well publicized in the literature. And because we were first, we took our lumps from the trade journals for the resulting problems with customer satisfaction.

We instituted a four-point plan to meet the challenge:

We instituted a new quality-control program. Now every product is treated just the way a customer treats it. It is taken out of the box, plugged in, and turned on. We make sure that the printer setup is accurate and that the hardware and the bundled software are compatible. At our weekly audit meetings we review that week's quality-control data; each team leader is now empowered to stop production to investigate a recurrent or unexplained problem.

We expanded our use of novices in our preproduction focus groups and in the quality-control program. We are concentrating on learning how the novice uses our products; in our expansion into the family market we expect to find that an increasing percentage of our customers are first-time computer owners.

We instituted a Process-Improvement Team, a group of 12 veteran employees committed to improving customer support and customer satisfaction. Among the first innovations of the Process-Improvement Team was the creation of more than 200 documents to assist users with common problems encountered when installing our kits and using common software.

These documents are on our website and can be faxed to customers at no charge when they call a special toll-free number.

We instituted a Quality Team of 15 employees charged with the responsibility of seeking Manufacturing's ideas about quality and efficiency standards.

### The Results

These measures have been in place for only two months, and it is too early to declare total victory, but the preliminary data are encouraging. Customer-support calls on our multimedia kits are down more than 15 percent the last two months. As reported by Customer Support, the incident of catastrophic problems--such as destruction of the operating system--is down more than 30 percent. The increased use of novices in design and in focus groups has led to three interface improvements that were noted in a *PC Week* article earlier this month. The work of the Quality Team has resulted in a 7 percent decrease in rejection rates of our multimedia kits.

In short, I think we are on the right track. But quality improvement is a frame of mind and a commitment, not a goal that can ever be reached. I pledge to you that we shall continue to strive to make RST the best place to buy PCs and PC-related products.

## General to Specific

General to specific is just as it says. It starts with a general overview, and then moves to specific details. This strategy is sometimes called an inverted pyramid. For example,

The proposed project involves transforming two currently existing electronic texts into a free, high-quality, interactive, multimedia textbook for the TCOM 2010 and WRIT 3140 courses at Kennesaw State University.

In order to achieve this overarching goal, we intend to

- create a textbook that satisfies both student and faculty requirements
- develop and incorporate materials that make the textbook desirable for both students and faculty members
- provide material that serves the distinct focus of each course
- make the textbook readily available for adoption and use
- encourage the textbook's adoption and use in onsite, hybrid, and online versions of the courses

and as a result, we believe we can increase student retention, progression, graduation, and employment rates.

## Specific to General

This pattern is the opposite of general to specific, and it is sometimes called the pyramid. It starts with details and moves to a general statement. For example

Marsha's writing was filled with spelling errors. In addition, she was having problems using commas correctly, and she needed assistance with quotation marks. When I reviewed her sentence structures, I found that there were minor problems with subordination and coordination, and she needed to review and practice her parallel sentence skills. With regard to her choices related to organizational strategy, it seemed she had not thought through how she wished to organize her information. In general, for a three year old, I found Marsha to be a very good writer.

## Order of Importance

Our two last organizational strategies are more important to less important, and less important to more important. They are exactly as they sound--organizing information from the most important reason for x to the least, or the least to the best. We are often asked "provide three reasons why x should happen." But as we do that, it's important that we consider the order in which we present our reasons. We want to present the reasons in the order of maximum impact. If your audience is likely to agree with you, then use least important to more important. That way, you end your paragraph on the most important note, and your reader should be highly motivated to follow through with your idea. If your audience is hesitant or even hostile to your idea, start with your most important reason for x. Use most important to least important to "hook" your reader early with your best evidence or argument so that they stay tuned for the supporting reasons. Following are some examples.

### *More important to less important*

Why should you learn Spanish? Recent research shows, learning a second language protects you against Alzheimer's and keeps your brain sharper, longer. Additional important reasons to learn Spanish are the same reasons for learning

any language. It is very good for your brain. It helps you to speak your native language better and understand it better. It gives you insight into other cultures, which increases your global understanding and improves your human relationships. For Americans, learning Spanish can help you keep pace with popular culture. If you like to Zumba or listen to popular music, then Spanish will enrich your experience. Finally, learn Spanish so that you sound cool, amigo, when you order your dishes at your favorite Mexican restaurant or tapas bar.

*Less important to more important*

Why should you learn French? Well, to sound sexy, of course. Everyone knows a French accent makes you more interesting and assists you in sounding not-so-silly when you order food in a fancy (a.k.a. French) restaurant. A second reason to learn French is to assist you in your trip to Paris. Paris is the world's number one tourist destination, and if you go there, you need to speak French. French is also a language that is fun to learn and pretty easy for English speakers. If you have never learned a foreign language before, French is a great one to start with. The most important reason to learn French, however, is the same reason for learning any language. It is very good for your brain. It helps you to speak your native language better and understand it better. It gives you insight into other cultures, which increases your global understanding and improves your human relationships. And, recent research shows, learning a second language protects you against Alzheimer's and keeps your brain sharper, longer.