



Essay Outlining

Organizing essays can seem pretty straight forward: introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion. However, collegiate essays give more leeway; you can usually organize things how you want unless otherwise specified by your instructor.

Where to start:

First, you should brainstorm what you are going to write about; it could be anything from analyzing historical context in a specific book or short story, or it could be analyzing and interpreting qualitative/quantitative data.

After you find out what you are writing about, you should address what citation style you are using. MLA will likely be used for humanities classes while APA might be implemented for sciences. These are definitely not the only two citation styles, but depending on your citation style, you may be required to assign an order to your essay. For example, APA requires a title page and an abstract before you really get the chance to begin your essay; this is important to your organization.

What's Next?

After you decide your topic and citation style, you should begin constructing your thesis (if a thesis is applicable). Your thesis should be clear, concise, and specific. After you have your thesis, you will need to construct your argument; your thesis will give you direction, but that doesn't mean your thesis will organize your main points. You need to figure out what you want to say and when you want to say it.

When you are organizing your essay, you may use the following methods of writing:

- *Narration*: telling a story
- *Description*: relating what you see, hear, taste, feel, and smell
- *Process*: describing a sequence of steps necessary to a process
- *Definition*: illustrating the meaning of certain words or ideas
- *Division and Classification*: grouping ideas, objects, or events into categories
- *Compare and Contrast*: finding similarities and/or differences between topics
- *Analogy*: making a comparison between two topics that initially seem unrelated
- *Cause and Effect*: explaining why something happened, or the influence of one event upon another

Once you have your arguments and their organization pinned down, it is time to begin writing. Everyone has a different manner of doing this, so find out what works best for you; just remember that **your 'acting thesis' is only a tentative one**; it is meant to get you started, and you may need to change it to fit your essay when you finish (as long as you stay within the parameters of the essay prompt). A common, and effective, method is to complete your essay with a conclusion that summarizes what you wrote, and then, replacing your thesis with this summary; you can do this if you feel that you have not stayed concise to your original thesis.