

Chronological Order

Chronological order is the order in which the events occurred, from first to last. This is the easiest pattern to write and to follow.

 Example:

It seemed like an ordinary day when she got up that morning, but Lynda was about to embark on the worst day of her life. First, she fell in the bathtub because her mother forgot to rinse out the bath oil. Then she spilled orange juice on the outfit she had spent hours putting together for school pictures. When she changed, she messed up the French braid her mother had put in her hair. As she walked out the door, she dropped all of her school books and her math homework flew away. Once she made it to the car she thought everything would be all right. She was wrong; her father didn't look before he backed out of the driveway and ran into the neighbor's truck. Lynda's side of the car was damaged the most, and she ended up with a broken arm. That night, she cried herself to sleep.

Cause and Effect Order

In this type of order, the cause (or reason) is usually discussed first. This then leads to a discussion of the effect (or result.)

 Example:

Because toys have become electronic devices, some children today are unable to entertain themselves. Gone are the days when children invented their own adventures and used sticks as swords, cookie sheets as armor, and refrigerator box as a fortress to defend. The electronic age has delivered children all sorts of gadgets and gizmos that are supposed to be realistic. Some toys even have buttons to push so prerecorded messages can be played to begin scripted adventures that require no imagination. No imagination? No wonder some children today have short attention spans.

Problem to Solution Order

In this type of order, the problem is presented first. Details about the problem, including its cause, follows. Next, a suggested solution will be discussed, including details that support the solution.

 Example:

Several students receive poor grades on writing assignments, not because they lack the ability to communicate, but because they can not seem to manage their time when it comes to a large project. They do not know where to begin, and therefore put things off until the last minute. To solve this problem, students need to develop a timeline for completing the project. If they divide the assignment into manageable "chunks" or parts and then set a schedule for completing each part, they will be able to finish the entire project before the deadline. Without the pressure of not knowing where to begin, the students will be able to focus on the assignment and communicate their ideas effectively.

Spatial Order

This type of organization takes the reader from one spot to the next, as if the reader were looking at something. It is very descriptive.

 Example:

I couldn't believe my eyes when we finally emerged from the storm shelter. Where the barn once stood there was now only a few tufts of hay. The path that led to the house was scattered with branches and debris. The house! The entire roof was gone. The north wall was caved in and we could see right into the house. Well, what was left of it. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I noticed that most of our belongings had been sucked up into the great vacuum and scattered across the countryside. We heard a loud cracking and moaning as the west wall gave way and collapsed, sending up a wave of dust. And yet, there in the middle of the front yard was mother's prized rose bush. It swayed in the breeze as if nothing had happened. Seeing it made me realize how lucky we were to be alive. We stood there in dismay, our arms locked around one another.

Climactic Order

This type of organization takes the reader from the least important idea to the most important idea. The ideas build in importance, holding the reader's attention. The best is saved for the last.

 Example:

My encounter with nature became a learning experience for me. I learned to come prepared for anything. Our canoe overturning was proof that anything could happen. All of our supplies were gone. I also learned that although nature is beautiful, she can also be deadly. If it hadn't been for the cave we discovered in the moonlight, the hail storm surely would have killed us. Most of all, I learned to trust my mother. I never thought I would say this, but she does know a thing or two. She kept her wits about her and kept me calm as well. Even in the middle of nowhere without any supplies, she still managed to take care of me. Her grandfather had taught her how to survive in the wild, and she hadn't forgotten a thing.

Reverse Climactic Order

In this type of organization, the most important idea is stated first and the least important idea is stated last. This method is used most often in newspaper articles. This way if the reader does not finish the article he/she will still know the most important details. This method grabs the reader's attention in the beginning, but it does not work very well in holding the reader's attention clear to the end.

 Example:

A plan to improve the city's park was approved Monday night by the city council. The plan involves adding landscaping to the north end, rebuilding the bridge over the lake, and updating the playground equipment. Funds for the project have been donated by local businesses who hope that improving the park will bring more people to the downtown area which will in turn bring more customers. The next order of business is for the city council to open the bidding process for the various improvements.

Process Order

In this type of order, a sequence of actions is described. It instructs the reader on how to do something. It is basically a set of directions. Owner's manuals and cookbooks are organized in this pattern.

 Example:

The first step in redesigning your closet is take everything out and sort through it. Anything you haven't worn in over a year should be given to charity. Check garments for wear and tear. Take care of anything that needs mending. If it is beyond repair, get rid of it. The second step is to install a closet organizer. Choose one that will hold the different types of garments in your wardrobe. The third step is to put items in the closet so that those you wear most often are easy to access. The final step is to stay organized. Put garments back in their appropriate places so that you will be able to find them.

Classification Order

In this type of order, the main idea is broken down into smaller areas or classifications. Each classification is then discussed.

 Example:

There are four basic modes of writing. Each mode may take different forms, but has a primary purpose. The first is expository writing, which has a purpose of explaining something or giving directions. Providing directions to your house is an example. The second mode is persuasive writing, which has a purpose of influencing the reader's way of thinking. An advertisement is an example of persuasive writing. The third mode is descriptive writing, which has a purpose of providing vivid details so that the reader can picture what is being presented. An essay that depicts the glorious Grand Canyon is an example. The fourth mode is narrative writing, which has a purpose of presenting an experience in the form of a story. A personal account of a vacation is an example of narrative writing.

Comparison/Contrast Order (block form)

In this pattern of organization one item is discussed in detail before the next item is mentioned. In other words, each item gets its own "block" of space within the writing.

 Example:

As a child, I thought my parents were ignorant and out of touch with reality. They couldn't possible understand anything I thought or felt. When they weren't annoying me with their ridiculous lectures, or grounding me for minor infractions of the rules, they were embarrassing me in public. As a parent, I find it frustrating that my children think I have no clue about their lives, even though I understand perfectly well what they are thinking or feeling. I find myself giving my children the same lectures I once thought were ridiculous. My children can not seem to follow the rules their father and I have set, and they are continuously embarrassing me in public. My, how things have changed.

Comparison/Contrast Order (point by point)

This type of order is again based on comparison (the similarities) and contrast (the differences.) Instead of being divided into parts, however, both sides of each point are discussed together.

 Example:

Although they are sisters, Jennifer and Jessica are complete opposites. Jennifer enjoys playing sports, while Jessica would rather watch. Jennifer has no interest in playing a musical instrument, while Jessica is the first chair violinist. Jennifer listens to new age music, while Jessica prefers country. Jennifer's favorite subject is English, and Jessica's favorite is math. Jennifer likes to curl up in a chair on a rainy day and read a good book, but Jessica would rather sleep all day. No one would ever guess that they are actually twins.