



Before Epics Come Essays

Unit 2: Pour It on the Page

Lesson 9: Behind the Outline—The Nine Methods of Organizing an Essay, part 1

The Denim Beret
writing and literature
for teens

Supplies: “Methods of Organization for Essays”; “Methods of Organization Challenge”; “Methods of Organization Challenge Essays”; graded lesson 3 worksheet; lesson 9 worksheet

Goal: to establish a working knowledge of the nine different methods of organizing an essay's body

Suggested Time: 5 sessions total (part 1=two sessions; part 2=three sessions)

Resource credits: *Writer's Inc.*; *Warriner's English Composition and Grammar: Complete Course*

SESSION 1

Quote of the Day:

“Good writers are those who keep the language efficient. That is to say, keep it accurate, keep it clear.” -- Ezra Pound

Warm-up

In your notebook, warm up for your lesson by spending 10-15 minutes writing a journal entry on one of these three options:

- 1) Free-write: Remember the one rule—let your mind and hand relax, and just write without stopping to think until your time is up. Nonsense is okay. Self-censoring is not.
- 2) Choose a subject/topic of interest to you and write about it. Don't worry about making it a “complete” essay or even a neat and logical one. Just stay on the topic and explore.
- 3) Respond to the following prompt: Find out who Frederick Douglass was and then discuss what he meant by the following statement: “Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.” – F.D.

When you are finished with your warm-up, have your parent check off your lesson planning log to confirm that you completed it.

Introduction

Throughout level 1 and level 2 thus far I have stressed the importance of strong structure in your compositions. Recall that structure in writing can be likened to the structure of a building. You shouldn't notice it more than the beauty and design of the building; yet, structure is what supports all that beauty and design. Without the strong frame underneath, the building would not stand.

If you completed the lessons on informal and formal outlines, then you already know that it is often a good idea to plan your compositions carefully, arranging the ideas you want to discuss in a logical, meaningful order. That, of course, is the purpose of crafting an outline in the first place. There is more to creating order in a composition than outlining your ideas, however; you also have to determine the best kind of order to use.

So far, we have discussed only the most basic kind of order: state a general idea and then provide specific support to explain it. Many others are available to you, though, and they are valuable to master if you are to become a strong, confident, expressive writer. Essays need to be organized in ways that will best unpack their main ideas and achieve the writer's purpose, and there is no single method or organization that is best for all types of essays. In this lesson, then, we'll take a quick look at the nine methods of organizing an essay's body. Once you understand them, you will have a powerful tool at your disposal for crafting a powerful, effective body in every essay you write.

Lesson, part 1: Thesis Statement is Key

You may be weary by now of hearing me harp on the importance of a strong thesis statement, but there is one more reason for this. Once you have written a thesis statement that clearly and succinctly presents your occasion (your reason for writing, or topic) and your position (what you want to say about it), the type of organization you should use in your body will often be obvious. This is because a well-written thesis statement acts as a guide for determining the organization of the body. This is another reason that writing a working thesis statement *before* you develop an outline is important.

Let's study an example of what I mean. Below is a weak thesis statement. It presents an occasion, but it does not clearly present the writer's position:

In my paper I will discuss a few things about football.

Determining the best way to organize this thesis statement would be difficult because it *isn't* a thesis statement. The sentence presents the topic of the paper, but it doesn't make a claim or take a position on it. It is not an "essay in a nutshell." A clear, well-crafted thesis statement will encapsulate the entire essay. In doing so, it will also point the way to the most effective structure of the body.

Here is a stronger thesis statement about football:

I enjoy football for a few reasons.

Notice how it presents a topic (football) and then takes a position that the writer can then defend in the body. It also indicates that the body will be organized to explain the reasons one at a time.

Here is another thesis statement on a different topic:

Although some people have strong opinions about renting vs. buying a house, both options have pros and cons that potential buyers need to consider carefully.

This thesis statement presents the entire message of the essay in a single statement, albeit a little awkwardly. The rest of the paper should "unpack" this statement with support, details, a hook, and wrap-up thoughts. How would the writer best organize the body based on this statement? If you aren't sure, consider the thesis statement's purpose. The writer's intention is to show why making the choice between renting and buying a house is not simple, and the writer intends to do this by presenting the strengths and weaknesses of each option. The writer is thus setting the reader up for a compare-contrast essay, so he or she will need to organize the paper in a format that will be conducive to a logical compare-contrast analysis.

This is a straightforward example; sometimes, though, thesis statements do not point the way so clearly. Sometimes you might need some strategies at hand for organizing essays, at least for a while. Eventually you will become so practiced at writing different kinds of essays and papers that you will not need to think this through as carefully. You will often just know the best way to organize your body. You will then be in a good position to develop your outline.

SESSION 2

Lesson, part 2: The Nine Different Methods of Organization

You should have received a handout with this lesson, called "Methods of Organization for Essays." Before you continue reading, I would like you to print it out and then cut-and-paste it

into your writing notebook under the “Writing Notes” section. It may be a handy reference guide later.

STOP and follow the directions. You may want to create a tab for this page in your notebook or add it to your table of contents, so that it is easy to find.

Now read the list carefully. When you understand each of the methods, continue with the lesson. At this point it would make sense to discuss each one of these methods in turn and provide examples, as we did for introductory hooks, but let’s do something different this time. We’ll instead play a two-part game that will require your skills of observation and logic.

STOP and open the following handouts: “The Methods of Organization Challenge,” “The Methods of Organization for Essays,” and “The Methods of Organization Challenge Essays” and follow the directions. When you are finished, send it to me for scoring. Then I will send you session 2 of this lesson.