

Patterns of Development

Another way to consider arrangement is according to purpose. Is the writer's purpose to compare and contrast, to narrate an event, to define a term? Each of these purposes suggests a method of organization, or arrangement. These patterns of development include a range of logical ways to organize an entire text or, more likely, individual paragraphs or sections. In the following pages, we'll discuss the major patterns of development by examining excerpts from the essays in this book.

Narration

Narration refers to telling a story or recounting a series of events. It can be based on personal experience or on knowledge gained from reading or observation. Chronology usually governs narration, which includes concrete detail, a point of view, and sometimes such elements as dialogue. Narration is not simply crafting an appealing story; it is crafting a story that supports your thesis.

Writers often use narration as a way to enter into their topics. In the following example, Rebecca Walker tells a story about her son to lead into her explanation of why she put together the anthology *Putting Down the Gun* (p. 412).

The idea for this book was born one night after a grueling conversation with my then eleven-year-old son. He had come home from his progressive middle school unnaturally quiet and withdrawn, shrugging off my questions of concern with uncharacteristic irritability. Where was the sunny, chatty boy I dropped off that morning? What had befallen him in the perilous halls of middle school? I backed off but kept a close eye on him, watching for clues.

After a big bowl of his favorite pasta, he sat on a sofa in my study and read his science textbook as I wrote at my desk. We both enjoyed this simple yet profound togetherness, the two of us focused on our own projects yet palpably connected. As we worked under the soft glow of paper lanterns, with the heat on high and our little dog snoring at his feet, my son began to relax. I could feel a shift as he began to remember, deep in his body, that he was home, that he was safe, that he did not have to brace to protect himself from the expectations of the outside world.

Walker brings her audience into her experience with her son by narrating step-by-step what happened and what she noticed when he returned from school. It's not only a personal story but also one that she will show has wider significance in the culture. Narration has the advantage of drawing readers in because everyone loves a good story.

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Description

Description is closely allied with narration because both include many specific details. However, unlike narration, description emphasizes the senses by painting a picture of how something looks, sounds, smells, tastes, or feels. Description is often used to establish a mood or atmosphere. Rarely is an entire essay descriptive, but clear and vivid description can make writing more persuasive. By asking readers to see what you see and feel what you feel, you make it easy for them to empathize with you, your subject, or your argument. In the following example from “Serving in Florida” (p. 179), Barbara Ehrenreich describes her coworkers:

I make friends, over time, with the other “girls” who work my shift: Nita, the tattooed twenty-something who taunts us by going around saying brightly, “Have we started making money yet?” Ellen, whose teenage son cooks on the graveyard shift and who once managed a restaurant in Massachusetts but won’t try out for management here because she prefers being a “common worker” and not “ordering people around.” Easy-going fiftyish Lucy, with the raucous laugh, who limps toward the end of the shift because of something that has gone wrong with her leg, the exact nature of which cannot be determined without health insurance. We talk about the usual girl things — men, children, and the sinister allure of Jerry’s chocolate peanut-butter cream pie.

Ehrenreich’s primary purpose here is to humanize her coworkers and make her readers understand their struggle to survive on the minimum wage. To achieve this, she makes them specific living-and-breathing human beings who are “tattooed” or have a “raucous laugh.”

Narration and description often work hand in hand, as in the following paragraph from “Shooting an Elephant” (p. 979) by George Orwell. The author narrates the death throes of the elephant in such dense and vivid detail that we mourn the loss and realize that something extraordinary has died, and the narrator (Orwell), like all of us, is diminished by that passing — which is the point Orwell wants us to understand:

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick — one never does when a shot goes home — but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time — it might have been five seconds, I dare say — he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs.

But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upward like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

Note the emotionally charged language, such as “devilish roar of glee,” and the strong verbs such as “slobbered,” “did not collapse but climbed.” Note the descriptive details: “jolt,” “sagging,” “drooping,” “desperate slowness.” The language is so vivid that we feel as though a drawing or painting is emerging with each detail the author adds.

Process Analysis

Process analysis explains how something works, how to do something, or how something was done. We use process analysis when we explain how to bake bread or set up an Excel spreadsheet, how to improve a difficult situation or assemble a treadmill. Many self-help books are essentially process analysis. The key to successful process analysis is clarity: it’s important to explain a subject clearly and logically, with transitions that mark the sequence of major steps, stages, or phases of the process.

In the essay “Transsexual Frogs” (p. 655), Elizabeth Royte uses process analysis to explain the research of Tyrone Hayes, a biologist at the University of California at Berkeley investigating the impact of the pesticide atrazine.

The next summer Hayes headed into the field. He loaded a refrigerated 18-wheel truck with 500 half-gallon buckets and drove east, followed by his students. He parked near an Indiana farm, a Wyoming river, and a Utah pond, filled his buckets with 18,000 pounds of water, and then turned his rig back toward Berkeley. He thawed the frozen water, poured it into hundreds of individual tanks, and dropped in thousands of leopard-frog eggs collected en route. To find out if frogs in the wild showed hermaphroditism, Hayes dissected juveniles from numerous sites. To see if frogs were vulnerable as adults, and if the effects were reversible, he exposed them to atrazine at different stages of their development.

In this example, Royte explains how something was done, that is, the actual physical journey that Hayes took when he “headed into the field”: he traveled from California to Indiana, Wyoming, Utah, and back to California. The verbs themselves emphasize the process of his work: he “loaded,” “parked,” “filled,” “turned . . . back,” “thawed,” “poured,” and “dropped.”

Exemplification

Providing a series of examples — facts, specific cases, or instances — turns a general idea into a concrete one; this makes your argument both clearer and more persuasive to a reader. A writer might use one extended example or a series of related ones to illustrate a point. You’re probably familiar with this type of development. How many times have you tried to explain something by saying, “Let me give you an example”?

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Aristotle taught that examples are a type of logical proof called **induction**. That is, a series of specific examples leads to a general conclusion. If you believe, for example, that hip-hop culture has gone mainstream, you might cite a series of examples that leads to that conclusion. For example, you could discuss hip-hop music in chain-store advertising, the language of hip-hop gaining widespread acceptance, and entertainers from many different backgrounds integrating elements of hip-hop into their music.

In the following paragraph from “I Know Why the Caged Bird Cannot Read” (p. 89), Francine Prose establishes the wide and, she believes, indiscriminate range of readings assigned in high school classes by giving many examples of those her own sons have read:

My own two sons, now twenty-one and seventeen, have read (in public and private schools) Shakespeare, Hawthorne, and Melville. But they’ve also slogged repeatedly through the manipulative melodramas of Alice Walker and Maya Angelou, through sentimental middlebrow favorites (*To Kill a Mockingbird* and *A Separate Peace*), the weaker novels of John Steinbeck, the fantasies of Ray Bradbury. My older son spent the first several weeks of sophomore English discussing the class’s summer assignment, *Ordinary People*, a weeper and former bestseller by Judith Guest about a “dysfunctional” family recovering from a teenage son’s suicide.

Prose develops her point by giving examples of authors, novels, and types of novels. But only in the case of *Ordinary People* does she discuss the example. The others are there to support her point about the rather random nature of books assigned in high school classrooms.

In the following paragraph, instead of giving several examples, Prose uses one extended example to make the point that even so-called great literature is often poorly taught. Note how she mines the example of *Huckleberry Finn* to discuss the various objections and concerns she has about teaching:

It’s cheering that so many lists include *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* — but not when we discover that this moving, funny novel is being taught not as a work of art but as a piece of damning evidence against that bigot, Mark Twain. A friend’s daughter’s English teacher informed a group of parents that the only reason to study *Huckleberry Finn* was to decide whether it was a racist text. Instructors consulting *Teaching Values Through Teaching Literature* will have resolved this debate long before they walk into the classroom to supervise “a close reading of *Huckleberry Finn* that will reveal the various ways in which Twain undercuts Jim’s humanity: in the minstrel routines with Huck as the ‘straight man’; in generalities about Blacks as unreliable, primitive and slow-witted. . . .”

By examining one case in depth — *Huckleberry Finn* — Prose considers the novel itself, ways it is taught, and the suggestions in one book of how to teach it. Note that she might have brought in other examples, treating each briefly, but focusing on one book allows her to examine the issue more closely.

Comparison and Contrast

A common pattern of development is comparison and contrast: juxtaposing two things to highlight their similarities and differences. Writers use comparison and contrast to analyze information carefully, which often reveals insights into the nature of the information being analyzed. Comparison and contrast is often required on examinations where you have to discuss the subtle differences or similarities in the method, style, or purpose of two texts.

In the following excerpt from “Walking the Path between Worlds” (p. 300), Lori Arviso Alvord compares and contrasts the landscape and culture of her home in the Southwest with that of New England and Dartmouth College:

My memories of my arrival in Hanover, New Hampshire, are mostly of the color green. Green cloaked the hillsides, crawled up the ivied walls, and was reflected in the river where the Dartmouth crew students sculled. For a girl who had never been far from Crownpoint, New Mexico, the green felt incredibly juicy, lush, beautiful, and threatening. Crownpoint had had vast acreage of sky and sand, but aside from the pastel scrub brush, mesquite, and chamiso, practically the only growing things there were the tiny stunted pines called pinion trees. Yet it is beautiful; you can see the edges and contours of red earth stretching all the way to the boxshaped faraway cliffs and the horizon. No horizon was in sight in Hanover, only trees. I felt claustrophobic.

If the physical contrasts were striking, the cultural ones were even more so. Although I felt lucky to be there, I was in complete culture shock. I thought people talked too much, laughed too loud, asked too many personal questions, and had no respect for privacy. They seemed overly competitive and put a higher value on material wealth than I was used to. Navajos placed much more emphasis on a person’s relations to family, clan, tribe, and the other inhabitants of the earth, both human and nonhuman, than on possessions. Everyone at home followed unwritten codes for behavior. We were taught to be humble and not to draw attention to ourselves, to favor cooperation over competition (so as not to make ourselves “look better” at another’s expense or hurt someone’s feelings), to value silence over words, to respect our elders, and to reserve our opinions until they were asked for.

In the first paragraph, Arviso emphasizes the physical details of the landscape, so her comparison and contrast relies on description. In the second paragraph, she is more analytical as she examines the behavior. Although she does not make a judgment directly, in both paragraphs she leads her readers to understand her conclusion that her New Mexico home — the landscape and its inhabitants — is what she prefers.

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Comparisons and contrasts, whether as a full essay or a paragraph, can be organized in two ways: subject-by-subject or point by point. In a subject by subject analysis, the writer discusses all elements of one subject, then turns to another. For instance, a comparison and contrast of two presidential candidates by subject would present a full discussion of the first candidate, then the second candidate. A point-by-point analysis is organized around the specific points of a discussion. So, a point-by-point analysis of two presidential candidates might discuss their education, then their experience, then the vision each has for the country. Arviso uses point-by-point analysis as she first compares and contrasts the landscapes and then the cultures of both places.

Classification and Division

It is important for readers as well as writers to be able to sort material or ideas into major categories. By answering the question, What goes together and why? Writers and readers can make connections between things that might otherwise seem unrelated. In some cases, the categories are ready-made, such as *single*, *married*, *divorced*, or *widowed*. In other cases, you might be asked either to analyze an essay that offers categories or to apply them. For instance, you might classify the books you're reading in class according to the categories Francis Bacon defined: "Some books are meant to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested."

Most of the time, a writer's task is to develop his or her own categories, to find a distinctive way of breaking down a larger idea or concept into parts. For example, in "Politics and the English Language" (p. 529), George Orwell sets up categories of imprecise and stale writing: "dying metaphors," "operators of verbal false limbs," "pretentious diction," and "meaningless words." He explains each in a paragraph with several examples and analysis. Classification and division is not the organization for his entire essay, however, because he is making a larger cause-and-effect argument that sloppy language leads to sloppy thinking; nevertheless, his classification scheme allows him to explore in a systematic way what he sees as problems.

In Amy Tan's essay "Mother Tongue" (p. 542) she classifies the "Englishes" she speaks into categories of public and private spheres:

Recently, I was made keenly aware of the different Englishes I do use. I was giving a talk to a large group of people, the same talk I had already given to half a dozen other groups. The nature of the talk was about my writing, my life, and my book, *The Joy Luck Club*. The talk was going along well enough, until I remembered one major difference that made the whole talk sound wrong. My mother was in the room. And it was perhaps the first time she had heard me give a lengthy speech, using the kind of English I have never used with her. I was saying things like "The intersection of memory upon imagination" and "There is an aspect of my fiction that related to thus-and-thus" — speech filled with carefully wrought grammatical phrases, burdened, it suddenly seemed to me, with nominalized forms, past perfect tenses, conditional phrases, all the forms of standard English that I had learned in school and through books, the forms of English I did not use at home with my mother.

Just last week, I was walking down the street with my mother, and I again found myself conscious of the English I was using, the English I do use with her. We were talking about the price of new and used furniture and I heard myself saying this: “Not waste money that way.” My husband was with us as well, and he didn’t notice any switch in my Englishes. And then I realized why. It’s because over the twenty years we’ve been together I’ve often used that same kind of English with him, and sometimes he even uses it with me. It has become our language of intimacy, a different sort of English that related to family talk, the language I grew up with.

Tan does not start out by identifying two categories, but as she describes them she classifies her “Englishes” as the English she learned in school and in books and the language of intimacy she learned at home.

Definition

So many discussions depend upon definition. In examining the benefits of attending an Ivy League school, for instance, we need to define *Ivy League* before we can have a meaningful conversation. If we are evaluating a program’s *success*, we must define what qualifies as success. Before we can determine whether certain behavior is or is not *patriotic*, we must define the term. Ratings systems for movies must carefully define *violence*. To ensure that writers and their audiences are speaking the same language, definition may lay the foundation to establish common ground or identifying areas of conflict.

Defining a term is often the first step in a debate or disagreement. In some cases, definition is only a paragraph or two that clarify terms, but in other cases, the purpose of an entire essay is to establish a definition. In Jane Howard’s essay “In Search of the Good Family” (p. 283), she explores the meaning of *family*, a common enough term, yet one she redefines. She opens by identifying similar terms: “Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family.” She contrasts the traditional “blood family” with “new families . . . [that] consist of friends of the road, ascribed by chance, or friends of the heart, achieved by choice.” She develops her essay by first establishing the need we all have for a network of “kin” who may or may not be blood relatives. Then she analyzes ten characteristics that define a family. Here is one:

Good families prize their rituals. Nothing welds a family more than these. Rituals are vital especially for clans without histories because they evoke a past, imply a future, and hint at continuity. No line in the seder service at Passover reassures more than the last: “Next year in Jerusalem!” A clan becomes more of a clan each time it gathers to observe a fixed ritual (Christmas, birthdays, Thanksgiving, and so on), grieves at a funeral (anyone may come to most funerals; those who do declare their tribalness), and devises a new rite of its own. Equinox breakfasts can be at least as welding as Memorial Day parades. Several of my colleagues and I used to meet for lunch every Pearl Harbor Day, preferably to eat some politically neutral fare like smorgasbord, to “forgive” our only ancestrally Japanese friend, Irene Kubota Neves. For that and other things we became, and remain, a sort of family.

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Howard explains the purpose of rituals in her opening paragraph and then provides specific examples to explain what she means by *rituals*. She offers such a variety of them that her readers cannot fail to understand the flexibility and openness she associates with her definition of *family*.

Cause and Effect

Analyzing the causes that lead to a certain effect or, conversely, the effects that result from a cause is a powerful foundation for argument. Rachel Carson's case for the unintended and unexpected effects of the pesticide DDT in *Silent Spring* is legendary (p. 798). Although she uses a number of different methods to organize and develop her analysis, this simple — or not so simple — causal link is the basis of everything that follows. On a similar topic, Terry Tempest Williams in "The Clan of One-Breasted Women" (p. 816) proceeds from the effect she sees — the breast cancer that has affected the women in her family — to argue that the cause is environmental.

Since causal analysis depends upon crystal clear logic, it is important to carefully trace a chain of cause and effect and to recognize possible contributing causes. You don't want to jump to the conclusion that there is only one cause or one result, nor do you want to mistake an effect for an underlying cause. In "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (p. 260), for instance, Martin Luther King Jr. points out that his critics had mistaken a cause for an effect: the protests of the civil rights movement were not the cause of violence but the effect of segregation.

Cause and effect is often signaled by a *why* in the title or the opening paragraph. In "I Know Why the Caged Bird Cannot Read" (p. 89), Francine Prose sets out what she believes are the causes for high school students' lack of enthusiasm for reading: "Given the dreariness with which literature is taught in many American classrooms, it seems miraculous that any sentient teenager would view reading as a source of pleasure." In the following paragraph, she explains the positive effects of reading classical literature:

Great novels can help us master the all-too-rare skill of tolerating — of being able to hold in mind — ambiguity and contradiction. Jay Gatsby has a shady past, but he's also sympathetic. Huck Finn is a liar, but we come to love him. A friend's student once wrote that Alice Munro's characters weren't people he'd choose to hang out with but that reading her work always made him feel "a little less petty and judgmental." Such benefits are denied to the young reader exposed only to books with banal, simple-minded moral equations as well as to the students encouraged to come up with reductive, wrong-headed readings of multilayered texts.

In her analysis, Prose argues for the positive effects of reading canonical literature, and she provides several examples. She concludes by pointing out that teaching less challenging works, or teaching more challenging works without acknowledging their complexity, has the effect of encouraging unclear or superficial thinking.

• **ASSIGNMENT** •

Reread Jody Heyman's essay "We Can Afford to Give Parents a Break" (p. 6), and discuss the patterns of development she uses. Which of these patterns prevails in the overall essay? Which does she use in specific sections or paragraphs?