

# How to Organize a Paper



## General tips

- Construct your entire paper to support your thesis.
- Aim to organize all material in a logical or cohesive way.
- Each paragraph should have 1 focus.

## Introduction

- Think of your introduction like a funnel.
- Typically provides some background or context for your topic before signaling what the focus of the paper will be. May state the significance of your topic or thesis.
- May be easier to write the introduction at the end, or at least to write an outline first, so you know to what you are introducing your readers.

## Body

- Aim to structure the paragraphs to build on one another and show the relationships between ideas in your paper. For example, go from general to specific or weakest claim to strongest claim.
- The body is where you: use your research (if any) through paraphrasing or direct quotations (always cite), put sources in conversation with one another, and show how sources support your analysis and claim.
- Can use transitional words to help signal the relationship between ideas and supporting points (ex. first, second, additionally, however, nonetheless, etc.).

## Conclusion

- Provides a brief summary of your claim—more fully than in the introduction.
- Emphasizes the significance of your argument and to/for whom it matters.
- May: connect your reader to the thesis, point out additional applications and/or suggest new research, but does not make new claims.

## How to ensure logical organization

**Before writing,** create an outline: Brainstorm (list all ideas that you want to include in your paper), Organize (group related ideas together), Order (arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete), Label (create main and sub headings).

**After writing,** create a brief reverse outline: in the left-hand margin, write down the topic of each paragraph; in the right-hand margin- write down how the paragraph topic advances the overall argument of the text. Tells you if each paragraph fits in the overall organization and if paragraphs should be shifted. You should be able to summarize quickly— if not, revise.

**Watch out** for wordiness, repetition, varied sentence and quotation length.

**Reread then:** revise, rewrite, move around, or delete unnecessary sentences or paragraphs.