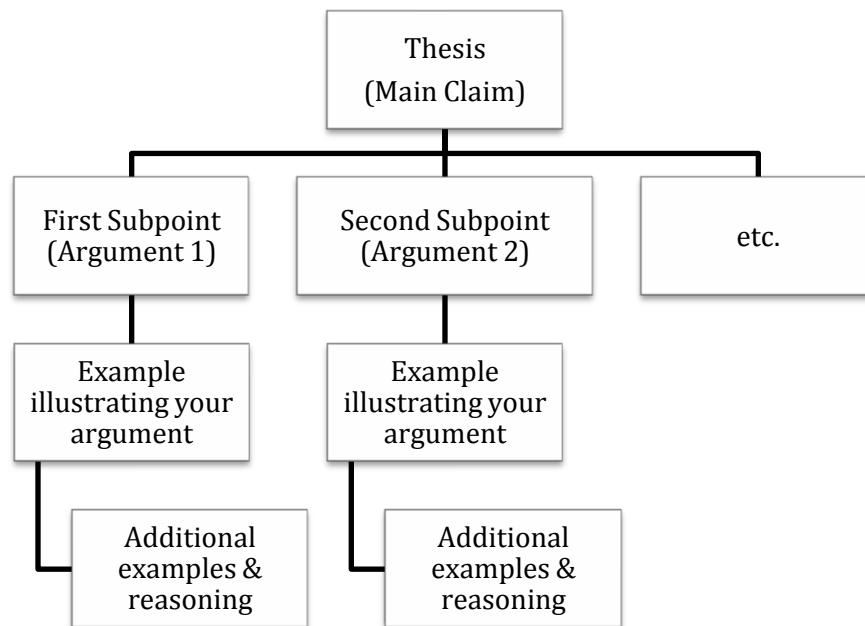


Organization: Papers & Paragraphs

Paper Organization

For the vast majority of college papers, effective organization can be most simply achieved through a chain of reasoning. Essentially, begin with a broad concept—in the case of most essays, an arguable thesis. The thesis should represent the broadest, most general claim of the essay. Any points in support of the thesis should be more specific. Additional examples should become more specific as a chain of reasoning progresses. Using such a structure creates an easy to follow sequence of concrete paragraphs.



Other principles to follow when organizing papers:

- **Present positive evidence before negative.** If you want to consider arguments *against* the points you've raised, or note what's wrong with something after you've noted its strengths, save those critiques for the end.
- **Build toward the most interesting part of your argument.** Save whatever you have the most to say about for later in your paper. Since this point will also likely be the most specific part of your paper, it will fit into the chain of reasoning outlined above.
- **Make explicit transitions between ideas.** Rather than simply following one point with another, show how the new subpoint relates to the previous idea. Note that these transitions generally come at the *beginning* of the new subpoint, not the end of the old one.

Paragraph Organization

This same structure can be used to organize paragraphs as well as entire essays. A topic sentence serves the same function for a paragraph as a thesis statement does for an entire paper. Just as the paragraphs in a paper support and develop on the thesis statement, the sentences of a paragraph support and develop on the topic sentence. For example, consider the following paragraph:

The two great values to be gained from social existence are: knowledge and trade. Man is the only species that can transmit and expand his store of knowledge from generation to generation; the knowledge potentially available to man is greater than any one man could begin to acquire in his own lifespan; every man gains an incalculable benefit from the knowledge discovered by others. The second great benefit is the division of labor: it enables a man to devote his effort to a particular field of work and to trade with others who specialize in other fields. This form of cooperation allows all men who take part in it to achieve a greater knowledge, skill and productive return on their effort than they could achieve if each had to produce everything he needs, on a desert island or on a self-sustaining farm.

—Ayn Rand, “The Nature of Government”

Notice how the sentences fit into a chain of reasoning. Explicit transitions like “The second great benefit” link one subtopic to the next. Numbers indicate levels of generality, from general to specific:

1. The two great values to be gained from social existence are: **knowledge** and **trade**.
[This topic sentence announces the two subtopics to be discussed in this paragraph.]
2. Man is the only species that can transmit and expand his store of **knowledge** from generation to generation; [Rand introduces the topic of knowledge]
3. The knowledge potentially available to man is greater than any one man could begin to acquire in his own lifespan; every man gains an incalculable benefit from the knowledge discovered by others. [She explains the effects of being able to communicate knowledge.]
2. The second great benefit is the division of labor: it enables a man to devote his effort to a particular field of work and to **trade** with others who specialize in other fields.
[Rand introduces the topic of trade.]
3. This form of cooperation allows all men who take part in it to achieve a greater knowledge, skill and productive return on their effort than they could achieve if each had to produce everything he needs, on a desert island or on a self-sustaining farm. [She explains the benefits of trade.]