

## Organizing Ideas

An effective essay should have a clear shape and organization of parts, which then help guide the reader through your ideas.

While numerous good ideas may occur to you while writing your essay, organizing your draft according to your ideas and the way you wish to develop them should provide you with a clear focus and direction.

Understanding the organization of your writing is especially important when dealing with a difficult or complex topic.

### 1) Distinguish the general and the specific

Distinguishing general and specific ideas helps you see the relations between them.

<u>Most general</u>	life form
	plant
	flowering plant
	rose
	American Beauty rose
<u>Most specific</u>	Aunt Filoména's prize-winning American Beauty rose

### 2) Choose an organization tool

Outlines can be invaluable in clarifying your thinking, suggesting discussion topics and shaping the overall argument.

The most common outlines are **scratch outline** and **formal outline**.

Scratch outline lists the key points of the paper in the order they will be discussed; see the following outline for an essay on Internet communication:

*Thesis statement:*

By lowering the barriers of physical appearance, the unique anonymity of Internet communication could build diversity into community.

*Scratch outline:*

No fear of prejudgment  
 Physical attributes unknown—age, race, gender, etc.  
 We won't be shut out because of appearance  
 Inability to prejudge others  
 Assumptions based on appearance  
 Meeting of minds only  
 Finding shared interests and concerns

A formal outline can be more suitable for more complex topics.

*Thesis statement*

By lowering the barriers of physical appearance, the unique anonymity of Internet communication could build diversity into community.

*Formal outline*

- I. No fear of being prejudged
  - a. Unknown physical attributes
    - i. Gender
    - ii. Age
    - iii. Race
    - iv. Style
  - b. Freer communication
  - c. No automatic rejection
- II. Inability to prejudge others
  - a. No assumptions based on appearance
    - i. Body type
    - ii. Physical disability
    - iii. Race
  - b. Discovery of shared interests and concerns
    - i. Sports and other activities
    - ii. Family values
    - iii. Political views
  - c. Reduction of physical bias

**3) Choose a structure**

Most essays share a basic shape: **introduction**, **body** and **conclusion**

*a) Introduction:*

- Usually a paragraph or two.
- Draws the reader into the essay
- Clarifies the topic
- Usually ends with the thesis statement

*b) Body:*

- Develops the thesis
- Its paragraphs develop the general points that support the thesis (each point usually takes up a paragraph or more)

*c) Conclusion:*

- Contains the most important ideas – what the reader should remember
- Often also suggest future course of action

**4) Link paragraphs in the essay**

- a) Each paragraph should contribute to the thesis
- b) Arrangement of the paragraphs should be clear and logical
- c) Create links between paragraphs – repetition, restatement, connecting words, etc.

**Exercise: Organizing ideas**

The following list of ideas was extracted by a student from freewriting he did for a brief paper on soccer in the United States. Using his thesis statement as a guide, pick out the general ideas and arrange the relevant specific points under them. In some cases you may have to infer general ideas to cover specific points in the list.

*Thesis statement*

Despite increasing interest within the United States, soccer may never be the sport here that it is elsewhere because both the potential fans and the potential backers resist it.

*List of ideas*

Sports seasons are already too crowded for fans.  
Soccer rules are confusing to Americans.  
A lot of kids play soccer in school, but the game is still “foreign.”  
Sports money goes where the money is.  
Backers are wary of losing money on new ventures.  
Fans have limited time to watch.  
Fans have limited money to pay for sports.  
Backers are concerned with TV contracts.  
Previous attempts to start a pro soccer league failed.  
TV contracts almost matter more than live audiences.  
Failure of the US Football League was costly.  
Baseball, football, hockey, and basketball seasons already overlap.  
Soccer fans couldn’t fill huge stadiums.  
American soccer fans are too few for TV interest.