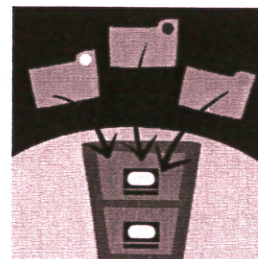


Organizational Patterns in Academic Writing

How are Organizational Patterns used in Academic Writing?

The purpose of academic writing is to present a number of ideas that somehow fit together to make sense. Sometimes the amount of new concepts, new words, and facts can be very large and complex. Professors, textbook authors, and researchers use a framework or plan that helps to communicate their ideas clearly. There are several types of plans, called organizational patterns that can be identified in academic writing. They help the author to organize his or her ideas in a way that makes sense, and hopefully, they help you to understand the material being presented.



How to Identify Organizational Patterns

Organizational patterns can be identified by what transitions or “signal words” the author uses. Recognizing the type of pattern that academic writing is organized by can help the reader to put all the facts together and understand what the text is all about. The following tables will help you to identify different organizational patterns.

Organizational Pattern	Purpose	Signal Words
Definition	Explains the meaning of new words or phrases.	is, refers to, can be defined as, means, consists of, involves, is a term that, is called, is characterized by, occurs when, are those that, entails, corresponds to, is literally
Classification	Divides a topic into parts based on shared characteristics.	classified as, comprises, is composed of, several varieties of, different stages of, different groups that, includes, one, first, second, another, finally, last
Chronological Order	Describes the sequence in which events occur in time.	first, second, later, before, next, as soon as, after, then, finally, meanwhile, following, last, during, in, on, until
Process	Describes the order in which things are done or how things work.	first, second, next, then, following, after that, last, finally
Order of Importance	Describes ideas in order of priority or preference.	less, more, primary, next, last, most important, primarily, secondarily
Spatial Order	Describes physical location or position in space.	above, below, beside, next to, in front of, behind, inside, outside, opposite, within, nearby
Cause and Effect	Describes how one or more things cause or are related to another.	<i>Causes:</i> because, because of, for, since, stems from, one cause is, one reason is, leads to, causes, creates, yields, produces, due to, breeds, for this reason <i>Effects:</i> consequently, results in, one result is,

		therefore, thus, as a result, hence
Comparison and Contrast	Discusses similarities and/or differences among ideas, theories, concepts, objects, or persons.	<i>Similarities:</i> both, also, similarly, like, likewise, too, as well as, resembles, correspondingly, in the same way, to compare, in comparison, share <i>Differences:</i> unlike, differs from, in contrast, on the other hand, instead, despite, nevertheless, however, in spite of, whereas, as opposed to
Listing/Enumeration	Organizes lists of information: characteristics, features, parts, or categories.	the following, several, for example, for instance, one, another, also, too, in other words, first second, numerals (1, 2, 3...), letters (a, b, c...), most important, the largest, the least, finally
Statement and Clarification	Indicates that information explaining a concept or idea will follow.	in fact, in other words, clearly, evidently, obviously
Summary	Indicates that a condensed review of an idea or piece of writing is to follow.	in summary, in conclusion, in brief, to summarize, to sum up, in short, on the whole
Generalization and Example	Provides examples that clarify a broad, general statement.	for example, for instance, that is, to illustrate, thus
Addition	Indicates that additional information will follow.	furthermore, additionally, also, besides, further, in addition, moreover, again

Adapted from McWhorter, Kathleen T. Reading Across the Disciplines. 2nd Ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005