

# Principles of Organization

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the various methods for organizing messages in a professional context. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. Message Elements

The purpose of business writing is to communicate facts and ideas. In order to accomplish that purpose, each document has key components that need to be present in order for your reading audience to understand the message.

These elements may seem simple to the point that you may question how any writer could neglect them. But if you take note of how often miscommunication and misunderstanding occur, particularly in written communications, you will realize that it happens all the time.

Omission or neglect may be intentional, but it is often unintentional; the writer assumes (wrongly) that the reader will easily understand a concept, idea, or the meaning of the message.

From background to language, culture to education, there are many variables that come into play and make effective communication a challenge. The degree to which you address these basic elements will increase the effectiveness of your documents.

Recall that each document must address the following:

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- How
- Why (sometimes)

If you have these elements in mind as you prepare your document, it will be easier to decide what to write and in what order. They will also be useful when you are reviewing your document before delivering it. If your draft omits any one of these elements or addresses it in an unclear fashion, you will know what you need to do to fix it.

## 2. Organizing Principles

Once you know the basic elements of your message, you need to decide in what order to present them to your audience. A central organizing principle will help you determine a logical order for your information.

It will also help you use your **productivity skill** as you work to complete any communication task. The time you take to plan and organize ahead of time will pay off with a clear, concise message that does not need to be re-explained or cleared up later.

➔ **EXAMPLE** One common organizing principle is chronology, or time: The writer tells what happened first, then what happened next, then what is happening now, and, finally, what is expected to happen in the future.

➔ **EXAMPLE** Another common organizing principle is comparison: The writer describes one product, an argument on one side of an issue, or one possible course of action; and then compares it with another product, argument, or course of action.

The table below lists different organizing principles for written documents, many of which are similar to those you learned about in the context of structuring a speech. The left column provides the name of the organizing principle, and the right column explains the process of organizing a document according to each principle.

Organizing Principle	Explanation of Process
Time (Chronological)	Structuring your document by time shows a series of events or steps in a process, which typically has a beginning, middle, and end. "Once upon a time stories" follow a chronological pattern.
Comparison	Structuring your document by comparison focuses on the similarities and/or differences between points or concepts.
Contrast	Structuring your document by using contrasting points highlights the differences between items and concepts.
Cause and Effect	Structuring your document by cause and effect establishes a relationship between two events or situations, making the connection clear.
Problem and Solution	Structuring your document by problem and solution means you state the problem and detail how it was solved. This approach is effective for persuasive documents.
Classification (Categorical)	Structuring your document by classification establishes categories.
Biographical	Structuring your document by biography means examining specific people as they relate to the central topic.
Space (Spatial)	Structuring your document by space involves examining the parts of something and how they fit together to form the whole.
Ascending and Descending	Structuring your document by ascending or descending order involves focusing on quantity and quality. One good story (quality) leads to the larger picture, or the reverse.
Psychological	Structuring your document on the psychological aspects of the audience involves focusing on their inherent needs and wants.
Elimination	Structuring your document using the process of elimination involves outlining all the possibilities.
Example	Structuring your document by example involves providing vivid, specific examples (as opposed to abstract representations of data) to support main points.

Process and Procedure	Structuring your document by process and procedure is similar to the time (chronological) organizational pattern with the distinction of steps or phases that lead to a complete end goal. This is often referred to as the "how-to" organizational pattern.
Point Pattern	Structuring your document in a series of points allows for the presentation of diverse assertions to be aligned in a cohesive argument with clear support.
Definition	Structuring your document with a guiding definition allows for a clear introduction of terms and concepts while reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation.
Testimonial	Structuring your document around a testimony, or first person account of an experience, can be an effective way to make an abstract concept clearer to an audience.
Ceremonial (Events, Ceremonies, or Celebrations)	Structuring your document for a ceremony involves focusing on thanking dignitaries and representatives, explaining the importance of the event, explaining the relationship of the event to the audience, and thanking the audience for participation in the event, ceremony, or celebration.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how to organize written messages so that they communicate what you intend them to. To achieve clarity, you must identify the fundamental **message elements**, including who, what, when, where, how, and why. These elements should then be arranged and presented according to the **organizing principle** that is most logical for your purpose.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This tutorial has been adapted from "Business Communication for Success" Version 1.0 by Scott McLean. Copyright 2010. ISBN 978-1-4533-2742-5 (Licensee Product: Workplace Communication), reprinted with permission from FlatWorld.