



Lesson 2.1

Finding the Right Design

In every police drama, detectives hot on the trail of a criminal scrutinize every clue, seeking a pattern to help them solve the case. The pattern, or organizational design, of a document can also help readers in a similar way, offering clues about how the writer has ordered or grouped ideas. A writer selects an organizational design to fit his or her topic and purpose. A description of a Gila monster calls for one organizational design, a recipe for lasagna quite another. Longer pieces of writing may call for a creative blend of designs that allow a writer to shift purposes, mixing narrative, informational, and descriptive writing, for example. In this lesson, you'll become familiar with five organizational designs and choose the one to fit a piece of your own writing.

Five Popular Designs

Following are short descriptions of five widely used organizational designs. There are, of course, many more. As you read each description, use a check mark (✓) in the box to show if you've used the design in your own writing or noticed it as a reader.

Design 1

Chronological Order: This design arranges information or events based on a progression of time, sometimes flashing back or leaping ahead.

Examples: *stories and novels, history, news stories, biographies*



- I have used this design in my own writing.
- I have noticed this design as a reader.

Design 2

Spatial Order: This design arranges details in terms of place. It is useful for creating images or “moving pictures” in a reader’s mind, helping the reader to see people, animals, objects, landscapes, and places as tiny as a single cell or vast as the universe.

Examples: *descriptions of people, objects, living things, places or landscapes, settings for a story*

- I have used this design in my own writing.
- I have noticed this design as a reader.

Design 3

Climactic Order: This design lets the writer lead up to (or sometimes wind down from) the most important point or event that writer has to share.

Examples: *news stories, literary analyses, major historic events*

- I have used this design in my own writing.
- I have noticed this design as a reader.

Design 4

Cause and Effect: Writers use this design to show how two events or behaviors are connected—specifically, how one thing causes or leads to another.

Examples: *persuasive essays of all kinds, predictions, critical analyses of current events*

- I have used this design in my own writing.
- I have noticed this design as a reader.



Design 5

Comparison-Contrast: Writers use this design to show how two people, objects, living things, places, events, concepts, and so forth are alike or different.

Examples: *persuasive essays, advertisements, literary analyses, historical analyses, political promotions, descriptive analyses*

- I have used this design in my own writing.
- I have noticed this design as a reader.

Reflection

Think about the kinds of writing you have done (or encountered) either outside of school or in your science, social studies, math, or health classes. Based on your experience, can you think of any organizational designs that are not included on our list?

List them here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

As you make notes, it is fine to

- check with a partner or other people in your writing circle.
- look through any books or other publications in your classroom.

Share and Compare

Share any additional designs you thought of and make a class list.



Name that Design

Read each of the following examples carefully, and see if you can identify the organizational design the writer used. Write the name of the design in the space provided and be prepared to explain your choice.

HINT: It helps to use an active reading strategy, circling important words or phrases that give clues about the design.

Example 1

My dad has become a runner. When he started, he could barely run to the end of the driveway. But he persisted, walking and running four miles daily. Each time, he would run as far as he could and walk when he was out of breath. He never gave up. Now he runs the full four miles, and he says he's setting a new goal: six miles. He hopes to run ten miles by the end of summer. He lifts weights, too. As a result, he's dropped thirty pounds and has had to buy all new clothes. Even his shoes got big! Who knew that could happen?

Organizational Design: _____

Example 2

Last night's thunderstorm put a local swimming pool out of business—at least temporarily. Guests and staff at the Lazy River Inn woke up to discover that the electrical storm had knocked out the pump on the resort's largest pool. According to a resort spokesperson, lightning struck the pump at about 1 a.m. Luckily, it did no other





hour. This morning, however, eager guests who had not heard the news were lined up outside the pool well before 10 a.m., the usual opening time. Temperatures were already close to 90 degrees, and a wave of disappointment swept over the swimsuit-clad crowd as the bad news was announced over the PA system. The Lazy River Inn hopes to have the pool up and running within two days.

Organizational Design: _____

The Right Design for the Job

Following are three writing tasks. Talk with a partner or members of your writing circle to choose the best design (or designs—it could take more than one) for each task. Write your choice in the space provided. Don't choose too quickly. Try to picture what the final piece of writing might look like.

Task 1

An essay about the devastation following Hurricane Katrina

Organizational Design: _____

Task 2

An editorial supporting a change in the school's mascot and team names

Organizational Design: _____

Task 3

An essay comparing a novel with the film adaptation of that novel

Organizational Design: _____



The Right Design for You

Choose a topic you could write about right now, without doing any research. Write about anything that's on your mind, or use our list to help you think of an idea. Follow these four steps:

1. Choose a topic (your own or one from our list below).
2. Choose a design that's a good fit. (It does not have to be one from this lesson.)
3. Do some prewriting, making notes that will help you follow your design.
4. Write for 15–20 minutes, making your ideas as easy to follow as possible.

My Topic

★ My topic: _____

- Being a teenager now versus in the past
- Description of any outdoor scene
- Your first day in kindergarten (or first day anywhere)
- Surprising things people learn playing video games
- Results of yielding to peer pressure



Share and Compare

Meet with your writing circle to share and discuss your writing. As you listen, think about each writer's design, but above all, ask this question: Is this writing easy to follow?



A Writer's Questions

Many writers feel most comfortable with a chronological order design. Why do you think this is? What problems could a writer encounter if he or she were comfortable with only one design?



Putting It to the Test

Do you think prompt writers have a design in mind when they write their prompts? Would it be helpful to figure out what that design is and follow it?