



Lesson 2.4

Putting the Puzzle Together

If you've ever put together a giant jigsaw puzzle, you know it's easier if you follow certain steps: turn *all* of the pieces right-side up, search for corner pieces and those flat-edged pieces that form the border, group pieces by color or other clues, and maybe sneak a peek at the picture on the box cover. (Yeah, some people think that's cheating.) As a writer, you already may have figured out that it helps to tackle organization step by step, too. After all, this trait is complex. In this lesson, you'll

- write a thesis sentence,
- select details to support it,
- create a strong lead,
- work on connecting ideas, and
- wrap up everything with a dynamite conclusion.

The result should be as clear as that picture on the puzzle box.

What's My Thesis?

Imagine you're writing a short chapter for a class book about amazing and dangerous sea creatures. You've gathered 20 details on your subject the stonefish. Now what?

One of the first organizational tasks any writer faces is deciding which pieces of information to keep and which ones to toss. You can't really make this decision until you have a thesis. So begin with that. Look through the list of



details. Do some go together to support a main message? Use those to create a one-sentence thesis. Write it here:

Topic: Stonefish

Thesis: _____

- 1. Stingrays only sting when they are stepped on.
- 2. Stonefish look like rocks but with venomous spines along their back.
- 3. Stonefish are camouflaged by their green to brown mottled coloration.
- 4. The spines of stonefish are sharp and strong enough to pierce a shoe.
- 5. Jellyfish have tentacles with millions of stinging cells.
- 6. A Portuguese man-of-war is not a true jellyfish.
- 7. Stonefish are the most venomous fish known to live in the ocean.
- 8. Stonefish habitats are usually around coral reefs, near rocks, or on the muddy sea bottom.
- 9. Stonefish live in the ocean.
- 10. Stonefish may grow up to 12 inches long.
- 11. Stonefish eat mainly shrimp, crustaceans, and small fish.
- 12. The sting from a stonefish will swell rapidly and cause extreme pain.
- 13. The scorpionfish is also venomous.
- 14. Stonefish are one of many poisonous, dangerous creatures you will find in Australia.



- 15.** They are also known as reef stonefish.
- 16.** The stonefish has 13 spines along its back and each spine has two venom sacs.
- 17.** Stonefish are sometimes sold for their meat.
- 18.** The venom of a stonefish can kill humans if not treated.
- 19.** It may help weaken the venom and ease pain if a hot compress is applied or the wound is submerged in hot water.
- 20.** The pain from a stonefish sting can be so painful that victims ask to have the limb amputated.

Keep It or Toss It?

Read through the list of details again, carefully. Check (✓) each piece of information you will keep because it supports your thesis. Omit anything that

- doesn't fit,
- is too general,
- isn't interesting enough, or
- is common knowledge.

Add to the List

Searching online or using any resources available, look for a few additional pieces of information that will add to your thesis. Write them here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Talk about your final list of details with your partner or in your writing circle. Do you have:

- Enough details
- Strong, intriguing, unusual details
- Too many details

Adjust your list any way you need to.

Grab the Reader’s Attention . . .

Here’s a lead sentence you could use:

This will be a report about the venomous stonefish.

Please don’t. You really need to grab your reader’s attention with the first sentence, and an announcement won’t do it. Look over your list of “keeper” details—and your new details. Does anything stand out as startling, interesting, or even odd? Begin with that. Write your lead (a sentence or two) here:

. . . and Keep Ideas Flowing!

Already you’ve

- narrowed your list of details and
- written a striking lead.

Look at your details one more time to get them in your head. Then write. Use your own paper and keep your pencil moving for at least 10 minutes. Glance at your detail list from time to time to keep ideas flowing in your head.

HINT: You do NOT have to use every single detail. Good writers never do.



Sharing Your Efforts

Just how complete is your puzzle? Let's find out. With your partner, take turns reading your stonefish paragraphs. Listen carefully for what's strong, and help each other figure out what the next step should be. Use this list to help you.

- Strong lead
- Easy-to-follow sequence
- Spotlight on the main idea
- Smooth transitions that link ideas or sentences
- Powerful conclusion that wraps things up



A Writer's Questions

Maybe you're not thinking of publishing the stonefish piece you wrote for this lesson. But what if you were? What's the very next thing you would work on? What about after that? Do you have a clear vision of the steps involved in organizing information effectively?



Putting It to the Test

We've seen how important leads and conclusions are in any piece of writing. Can you think of some standard leads or conclusions a writer would be wise to avoid when writing an on-demand essay? Remember, readers who score thousands and thousands of essays have heard some leads and conclusions—well, let's just say, *many* times.