

# How Information is Organized

There are a few common forms writers use to organize information. These can be used for individual paragraphs or entire essays, chapters or books. If you can identify which form an author is using, you can quickly and reliably identify what vocabulary you *must* know to understand what the author is trying to tell you.

**1. The Pyramid:** One big argument that is supported by many small ones. Arguments are made in increasing order of importance, and build off of each other. *Usually used for essays.*

**2. The Timeline:** Tells a story through time from beginning to end/now. Arguments are made in chronological order, usually from beginning to end. *Usually used for life stories.*

**3. The Overview:** Facts and opinions in no particular order of importance. Covers a little bit of everything to communicate a feeling, in addition to facts. *Usually used for more casual writings.*

In the next three pages, there are examples of these structures used for entire essays as well as in individual paragraphs.

## Questions

1. What style of list do you like best? Why?
2. What style do you like the least? Why?
3. What style do you find the easiest to understand? The most difficult?
4. What style do you see most often?

**1. The Pyramid:** One big argument that is supported by many small ones.

Freedom is what is most important for humans.

Only humans can comprehend freedom.

Humanity has continuously struggled throughout history for it.

Millions today sacrifice their comfort and safety for freedom.

**Wouldn't you fight for your freedom?**

“The results from this study for the number of children who walk or ride a bike to school are lower than the reported national average (13 percent walk, according to a telephone survey of parents). One explanation for this discrepancy may be the geography. None of the schools observed were in a major metropolitan center, where most students live within walking distance of their school. Additionally, researchers believe that “the observation system from this study may produce more accurate estimates compared with prior survey-based estimates.”

**Where can you find the most important vocabulary?**

- Topic sentence
- First sentence of each paragraph
- The beginning and end of the conclusion paragraph, or the conclusion sentence

## 2. The Timeline: Tells a story through time from beginning to end/now.

<u>Up until he killed himself, author David Foster Wallace fought depression with the same vigor with which he struggled with his writing.</u>	
1981	In his first year of college, David Foster Wallace decides to become an author. He is also diagnosed with depression, which dogs him throughout his life.
1987	Wallace's first book gets mixed reviews from critics, but popularizes his unique writing style. He worries he'll to kill himself and moves home again.
1988	Wallace tries to kill himself and decides to quit writing. He applies to Harvard.
1989	He begins studying at Harvard, but is unhappy the professors don't treat him as a peer. He starts writing a new book and taking antidepressants.
1990	Wallace's second book is not as successful as the first; he almost kills himself, but moves to a halfway house and starts writing again. He starts going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and is deeply influenced by what he learns.
1996	His third book, <i>Infinite Jest</i> , quickly becomes among most influential of the decade. Readers love how it shows the sadness and emptiness of modern life. Wallace is thrilled, yet terrified he'll never write another book as good.
2007	Wallace makes little progress on his new book. He goes off antidepressants, worried that the side effects are interfering with his writing.
2008	David Foster Wallace kills himself at his home in Southern California.

“One of the peculiarities of the white race's presence in America is how little intention has been applied to it. As a people, wherever we have been, we have never really intended to be. The continent is said to have been discovered by an Italian who was on his way to India. The earliest explorers were looking for gold, which was, after an early streak of luck in Mexico, always somewhere farther on. Conquests and foundings were incidental to this search – which did not, and could not, end until the continent was finally laid open in an orgy of goldseeking in the middle of the last century. Once the unknown of geography was mapped, the industrial marketplace became the new frontier, and we continued, with largely the same motives and with increasing haste and anxiety, to displace ourselves – no longer with unity of direction, like a migrant flock, but like refugees from a broken ant hill. In our own time we have invaded foreign lands and the moon with the high-toned patriotism of the conquistadors, and with the same mixture of fantasy and avarice.”

-Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America*

### Where can you find the most important vocabulary?

- Topic sentence
- The more important sections – usually the longer ones.
- The conclusion

### 3. The Overview: Covers a little bit of everything: people, places, ideas, etc.

<u>The most important music of the 1980s came from Manchester, England.</u>		
Manchester is a filthy, dying industrial city.	Local label Factory Records promotes many bands that become incredibly famous. They go bankrupt in 1992.	
<i>The band Joy Division, of Factory Records, gets really famous, and is a huge part of the Manchester scene.</i>	The Happy Mondays, also on Factory Records, are among the first bands to popularize Rave music.	The lead singer of Joy Division kills himself. The remaining members form a new band, New Order, that becomes even more popular. New order soon becomes one of the biggest bands in the world.
Gang members start selling drugs at the Hacienda, and get into a few shoot outs there.	The Happy Mondays get a lot of money to make a new album, but spend it all on drugs. Factory Records loses a ton of money.	
<b>Drugs help destroy the Manchester music scene: the listeners, the music venues, and the artists themselves.</b>	By the 1990s, Manchester is no longer creating such incredible and interesting music. But it has left its mark on the world forever. And it's never been the same.	

“Consider the following: What do you do when your 6-month-old baby fusses? You can give him a pacifier, turn on a mobile, change his diaper, walk about with him in your arms, sing him a lullaby, offer a breast, rattle a shaker, plead for help, or shut the door and go away. Each of these options is 'right' in some cultures, but not others. Indeed, some parents are instructed not to pick up a fussy baby and 'spoil' them, while others are considered negligent if they don't walk around with their children nearly all day and night.”

#### Where can you find the most important vocabulary?

- Topic sentence
- The more important sections – usually the longer ones
- Themes or ideas that repeat themselves
- The beginning and end of the conclusion