

Organizing Essays Mini-Lesson

Lesson Objective

Students will learn several strategies for organizing short, persuasive essays, preferably after they have started pre-writing. This lesson emphasizes the usefulness of developing strong thesis statements and effective outlines as part of the writing process.

Handouts

1. “Organizing Essays: Writing as Process” (1 page)
2. “Formulating a Thesis Statement” (1 page)
3. “Creating an Outline” (2 pages)

Length of Lesson

20-25 minutes

Variations for Different Disciplines

1. General (ML_organizing_GEN.doc)

Source

Parts of this mini-lesson were taken from Purdue’s OWL website, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>, as well as the St. Helen’s School District website. Other parts were written by Tahneer Oksman (WF, 2009-2011) and Jordan Pascoe (WF, 2010-2011)

Approved

MM/DD/YY

File name of this document

ML_organizing_GEN.doc

Lesson Instructions

1. Introduce the reasons for organizing an essay and the intersection between a thesis statement, an outline, and the various stages of writing (5 minutes).

A sample script follows:

“It’s great to have many ideas to write about, but it’s also important to organize those ideas in a logical way that your reader can understand. Without an effective organization, your essay can become confusing, and your main idea can get lost on the reader. Taking a few minutes to outline your essay before or after you begin writing will help you organize your ideas and group them effectively throughout your essay.

When you start a paper, you should have in mind a general topic that you wish to write about. A topic is a general area of inquiry or the general subject of your paper. A thesis statement is an argument that you present based on your topic. The complexity of your thesis statement will depend on the length and purpose of your paper.

Some people like to try and think of a thesis statement *before* they start writing their paper or even at outline. Others start with some version of pre-writing (free-writing or a loose outline) and then work on creating a solid thesis. In any case, it is always important to go back and revise your thesis statement as your paper develops.”

2. Give out handout I and discuss importance of prewriting and researching.

3. Give out handout II and review the two rules set out on thesis statement writing. On the board, you should write:

Thesis Statements:

1. *Debatable*
2. *Scope*

When reviewing the sample thesis statements, here are some tips:

1. Brooklyn College has security guards posted at the entrance to the main campus. (This statement is not debatable.)
2. College campuses need tighter security. (The scope is too broad for this statement.)
3. Brooklyn College needs better security. (This statement is not specific enough.)

When you elicit a thesis statement, write it on the board. Here is an example of a solid statement: *Brooklyn College's security is too lax; the campus should have security guards in every building, and students should be required to show their I.D.s each time they enter a building.*

4. Give out handout III and discuss the different ways you might create an outline.

If there is time:

On the board, you might attempt to sketch a very brief outline for the class, either using one of their assignments or using one of the thesis statements you went over in Handout I. If you are starting with a compare-and-contrast thesis statement, be sure to stress the difference between a point-by-point outline and a subject-by-subject outline (you may want to suggest that a point-by-point outline tends to be more effective for compare-and-contrast essays).

Finally, show students the outline we have provided.

Organizing Essays: Writing as Process

Essay question:

Some critics are concerned about security at Brooklyn College. Evaluate the security procedures at Brooklyn College and argue whether or not they need to be improved. If so, recommend improvements. If not, state your reasons as to why the status quo is sufficient.

Step 1: Read the Assignment

The assignment can guide you as you organize your essay. Often, it contains important clues about the kind of essay you need to write. Read the assignment carefully: what is it asking you to do?

- Evaluate
- Argue/Recommend

Step 2: Generate Ideas with Prewriting

What information do we need in order to write this essay? What kind of evidence do we need in order to evaluate and recommend?

Ask yourself: What do I know about security at Brooklyn College?

- Brainstorm
- Freewrite
- Research

Once you've gathered your ideas, it's time to formulate a thesis statement.

Formulating a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is a single, complete sentence that succinctly expresses your view concerning a particular topic. It will generally be included in the introductory paragraph of your essay, and you must be sure that you support the statement in the body of the essay.

Your thesis statement will very often be the answer to the question: What does this information mean?

Two Main Questions to Ask About Your Thesis Statement

- ▶ Is your thesis statement debatable?

- ▶ Does your thesis statement have a proper scope (not too narrow and not too broad)?

Consider the following examples. Are these strong thesis statements?

1. Brooklyn College has security guards posted at the entrance to the main campus.
2. College campuses need tighter security.
3. Brooklyn College needs better security.

Write your own thesis statement in response to the assignment above:

Creating an Outline

Your thesis statement can help you to organize your essay. Now that you have a thesis, you can develop an outline for your essay. An outline organizes your ideas, and it makes writing your essay easier. A clear essay must be well-organized, and an outline helps you to think about the logic of your argument. It can also help you to show relationships among ideas in your writing, and it can define boundaries and groups of ideas.

How do I create an outline?

There are many ways you can organize an essay. Remember, the writing assignment may give you clues about how to organize your essay. A well-structured thesis, too, may help you to shape your outline. You might do any of the following:

- **Brainstorm:** List all the ideas that you want to include in your paper.
- **Organize:** Group related ideas together.
- **Order:** Arrange material in a logical order appropriate to your topic (e.g., general to specific, chronological, point by point)
- **Label:** Create main and sub headings.

Creating an outline will make organizing your thoughts a lot easier, either before or after you have written an initial draft of your essay. Even if you end up departing from the structure you create with the outline, making any kind of outline (even just jotting down some main ideas) will be beneficial to your writing process. Outlines, as well as thesis statements, can and should be revised as you write, as your ideas should become sharper and more refined throughout the writing process.

Sample Outline:

I. Introduction:

Thesis: Brooklyn College's security is too lax; the campus should have security guards in every building, and students should be required to show their I.D.s each time they enter a building.

II. Body:

A. Brooklyn College has a relaxed security system. Evidence: BC places guards only at the main entrances to campus. Students rarely show I.D. (Evaluation)

B. Policies at other CUNY campuses highlight the relaxed nature of security at BC. Evidence: Other CUNY campuses have security guards at the door of each building, and students cannot enter without showing I.D. or signing in. (Evaluation)

C. Like other CUNY campuses, BC should place security guards in every building so that students must show I.D. to enter. (Recommendation)

III. Conclusion

With the new and inexpensive I.D. policy, students will feel safer and have an easier time focusing on their studies.