



UCONN Hartford Writing Center
UG Building, Room 303
(860) 570-9237 / hartfordwriting@gmail.com

Improving Essay Structure

This exercise is meant to give you a tool to help you explore alternative structures for your paper.

- 1) First, in a new word document or on a blank piece of paper write, in a sentence or two, the main idea or concept of your paper (what some might call your thesis).
- 2) Next, read your paper carefully and identify each idea or concept that your paper engages with. When you identify an idea, summarize it in a brief sentence and write it as a bullet point in your new word document or blank piece of paper. Keep in mind that some of your paragraphs may contain more than one idea, or that one idea may span multiple paragraphs. If you are having trouble putting an idea into a single sentence, then it may be worth looking at making it two ideas.
- 3) Once you have done this for your whole paper, put your paper away so that you can't see it. Now, looking only at the bullet point summaries you have written, reorganize them so that one idea seems to flow naturally into the next. Meaning that each idea engages with the previous idea while also setting the stage for the one that follows.
- 4) If you find that you don't want to reorganize them because you think that they seem to make enough sense the way they are, try cutting up the paper so that each sentence or bullet point/idea is on its own separate strip. Shuffle them all together then lay them out in front of you. Now try and arrange them in an order that makes the most sense. This can be more effective if you are having trouble escaping the preconceptions you have about your original paper structure.
- 5) Now that you have your ideas reorganized, take your paper back out and reorganize the actual text to mirror the new organization of your underlying ideas. At this point, you will probably find that you need to write new transitions, or at least modify the ones you have, or possibly even tweak the wording throughout your entire essay.

It is important to note that changing the structure of your paper may change what it is arguing in a subtle way. This is good! But it may mean you have to reexamine your introduction and conclusion paragraphs.