

Peer Critique Guideline: Organization

When you read a paper, whether it is your own or someone else's, it is a good idea to try to look at only one aspect of the paper at a time. This guideline suggests methods for analyzing a paper's organizational structure. Normally this kind of peer critique works best if you exchange papers with a partner and work silently by writing a response based on the following guidelines. When both of you have finished writing a response, you can go over your responses with each other.

1. Read the first paragraph and, without looking at the rest of the paper, write a description of what you think the rest of the paper will say. (Normally, the first paragraph should give a reader a pretty good idea about what is coming up.)

2. Read the first sentences of each paragraph in the rest of the paper. Try to outline the paper without reading the body of each paragraph. Does the paper follow a narrative pattern (one event follows another based on their sequence in time) or an analytical pattern (the body is broken on the basis of some division rather than time)?

A. If it follows a narrative pattern, draw a rectangle and place the name of the first event or step inside it. Then draw another rectangle beneath it and draw a line between the two. Write the name of the second episode or step in it. Continue this process (making a flow chart) until all of the major episodes have been listed. Now go back and find any words, phrases, or sentences that signal the reader that one episode is ending and another is beginning. Write these next to the lines which connect the rectangles.

B. If it follows an analytical pattern, figure out how many first-level divisions there are in the body. Title each division and list those titles in a numbered list, leaving a couple blank lines between each item. Go back to the blank lines between each division, and write any transition sentences or phrases or any organizational markers which show the reader that the writer is moving from one division to the other.

3. Reread the first couple of paragraphs again looking for a purpose statement, key sentence, or thesis sentence. Write it out.

4. Read the conclusion. Write out any phrases or words which signal that the text is about to end. If the conclusion summarizes the body, write the first couple words of the sentence which begins the summary.

5. Write a note to the writer explaining your experience as someone who read the text looking for organization. Was it easy to follow the writer's pattern? If so, what made it easy? Did you get lost or have the nagging feeling that you didn't know where the writer was going? If so, what did the writer fail to do?

Adapted from Northern Illinois University's WAC resource page