Students often visit the Writing Center and ask me to review their paper. “Could you check to see if my paper flows?” they might ask me. Or, “I know what I’m trying to say but I’m not sure my reader will get it.” Without realizing it, students are asking me about their paper’s organization.

It’s not easy to clearly define organization in writing, but everyone sure notices when it’s missing! The ultimate goal of organization is to create a piece of writing that makes sense to your reader. Without clear organization, your readers are confused and your brilliant ideas are lost, making your paper seem scattered, dull, unimaginative, and illogical.

When organizing your paper, think about two things:

1. How will you structure your paper? What will be in the beginning? In the middle? In the end?
2. How will you glue all this together? Your writing should show the relationship between different sentences and ideas.

First, we’ll need a map...

You need a thesis! All organization starts with a “working thesis” statement – one that states your general argument or purpose for writing but not quite the specific points you will make. When beginning a writing project, sometimes it’s best to start with a research question to guide your early research and writing efforts. Over time, the research question will morph into your thesis statement.

We could write a whole article on thesis statements… oh wait, we already have! Check out “Taming the Thesis Statement” in Volume I, Issue I of our newsletter, Writing Right @ CGCC, available through the Writing Center (L227) or online at our website.

The Road Trip
As a writer, you have many options for presenting your ideas. Not every pattern will work for every writing situation -- choose a structure that is interesting, but more importantly, logical for your goals with this piece of writing. Like the pieces of a puzzle, everything must fit together. Here are some ideas to get you started. As your writing grows more sophisticated, you’ll likely be including more than one pattern in an assignment!

- Chronological Order: the easiest pattern to write & follow, chronological order is the order in which the events occurred, from first to last.
- Cause and Effect Order: the cause (or reason) is usually discussed first, then leads to a discussion of the effect (or results).
- Problem to Solution Order: in this type of order, the problem is presented first. Details about the problems, including its cause, follows. Next, a suggested solution (with details) is discussed.
- Spatial Order: very descriptive by nature, this type of organization takes the reader from one spot to the next, as if the reader were looking at the scene.
- Climactic Order: this type of organization takes the reader from the least important idea to the most important, saving the best for last.
- Reverse Climactic Order: most often used in newspaper articles, this type of organization starts with the most important idea and works its way to least important.
- Process Order: by describing a sequence of action, this type of order instructs the reader on how to do something.
- Classification Order: the main idea is broken down into smaller areas or classifications and then discussed.
- Comparison/Contrast Order (block form): in this pattern of organization, one item is discussed in detail before the next item is mentioned, so that each item gets its own “block” of space.
Dear Grammar Goddess:

Nearly every day, someone will ask me, “How are you?” which makes me wonder which is the grammatically correct response: “I am well” or “I am good, thank you.” What do you think?

-- Polite in Peoria

Dear Polite:

In both casual speech and formal writing, we frequently have to choose between the adjective good and the adverb well. With most verbs, there is no contest: when modifying a verb, use the adverb.

He swims well.
He knows only too well who the murderer is.

However, when using a linking verb or a verb that has to do with the five human senses, you want to use the adjective instead.

How are you? I’m feeling good, thank you.
After a bath, the baby smells so good.
Even after my careful paint job, this room doesn’t look good.

Many careful writers, however, will use well after linking verbs relating to health, and this is perfectly all right. In fact, to say that you are good or that you feel good usually implies not only that you’re OK physically but also that your spirits are high.

“How are you?”
“I am well, thank you.”

Source: http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/adjectives.htm
What are Mnemonics?

Mnemonic is a very general word. It is defined simply as some device which aids the memorization of something. The word comes from the Greek mnemonikós, which refers to the mind.

These devices come in a variety of forms. One common sort is the acronym. To recall the spelling of the word mnemonic, for example, you could memorize the following phrase:

Monkey Nut Eating Means Old Nutshells In Carpet.

Taking the initial letters of each word spells out MNEMONIC. Of course, if you find it harder to memorize the sentence than the spelling of the word directly then the mnemonic serves no useful purpose. However such sentences are often easier to learn, especially for words with tricky spellings.

Spelling Acronyms

The following mnemonics are sentences or phrases in which the initial letters of the words spell out a word which many people find rather tricky to spell.

BECAUSE
Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants

ARITHMETIC
A Rat In The House May Eat The Ice Cream

GEOGRAPHY
General Eisenhower’s Oldest Girl Rode A Pony Home Yesterday

RHYTHM
Rhythm Helps Your Two Hips Move

NECESSARY
Not Every Cat Eats Sardines (Some Are Really Yummy)

ARGUMENT
A Rude Girl Undresses; My Eyes Need Taping!

OCEAN
Only Cats’ Eyes Are Narrow

Source (with permission): Fun-with-Words
http://www.fun-with-words.com/

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Speak to Me!
A column celebrating the CGCC Community

Heather Horn, English Faculty

“Writing can be hard for everyone,” says Heather Horn, Language and Humanities faculty. “But just because it’s hard doesn’t mean you can’t do it.”

Heather speaks from personal experience. As an undergraduate at Rice University in Houston, TX, Heather was frustrated by her own struggles with writing: “With the help of a caring teacher, I was able to break through those struggles and find satisfaction in my final drafts.” It was that journey of overcoming a great challenge that led to her decision to become an English major and later a teacher of college writing, so she could help students as she’d been helped at Rice.

Heather believes that writing is not a special, unique talent that “just some people” possess. “Writing is something all of us can and will do throughout our lives,” she explains. Many students are intimidated by the writing process, so Heather, like many writing instructors, uses a technique called “scaffolding” whereby each new writing skill or activity supports students as they take on increasingly complex tasks.

Heather teaches in the COMPASS Learning Community that merges English and personal development/communication courses to focus on the needs of developmental writers. She also teaches in the STRETCH program, a six credit, two semester course that allows students to complete ENG 101 over two semesters while gaining three general elective credits.

“Heads who like personal attention and support from their instructor will probably enjoy my class,” says Heather. “I do a lot of one-on-one conferencing with students, so you always know where you stand in my class.”

Heather joined CGCC in the fall of 2003 after teaching for five years at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She also was adjunct faculty at Moorpark College and Santa Barbara City College. Heather is very impressed with the faculty and students at Chandler-Gilbert Community College. “Everyone is so committed to instructional initiatives that I care about, like service learning, learning communities and active learning. We really do put students first here.”

Heather realizes that writing can be difficult for students, especially for students who are writing papers for many different courses and instructors. But she encourages students to realize that they need not struggle with those challenges all alone. “Our job, as instructors, is to help students, not judge or intimidate you. We want to support you and help you be successful.”
A dictionary can be your best text-based friend as you work through your college courses. Keep your dictionary within arm’s length and make it part of your regular study habits (you can even use online dictionaries). Get into the routine of looking up new words, but don’t just stop there! Get “caught” reading the dictionary for fun. As you look up words, stick around and check others. Try reading a few words above and below the word you’re looking for. Look at the etymology (word history/origin) included in the entry you looked up. Though some etymologies won’t be very exciting or valuable to you, you might learn something noteworthy.

If you’re frustrated with spelling issues and having trouble looking up words, try this strategy: start with what you do know like the first, second, or third letters. When you get to the first letter you are unsure of then check the different possibilities. You will likely find your word. If not, try to think of a similar-sounding word that you know is spelled oddly. Perhaps you are trying to find ‘knight’ and it sounds like ‘knife,’ which you do know how to spell. You are on your way to the correct spelling.

Here are the most looked-up words of 2004 (online) according to Merriam Webster Online. How many of these did you look up last year?

10. defenestration
9. sovereignty
8. partisan
7. peloton
6. cicada
5. hurricane
4. insurgent
3. electoral
2. incumbent
1. blog

Sources:
www.m-w.com/info/04words.htm
http://dictionary.reference.com/features/10things.html
Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary: www.m-w.com
Dictionary.com: www.dictionary.com

Resolve to edge in a little reading every day, if it is but a single sentence. If you gain fifteen minutes a day, it will make itself felt at the end of the year.

Horace Mann (1796 - 1859)