

Rubric Category	Organization
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Scores 1 and 2
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1a
Argument Type	All arguments

# Organizing Your Argument: Ordering Subclaims

*Students create an outline in order to choose an effective organizational structure for paragraphs, both between each other and back to the main argument.*

## Understanding the Expectations

In order for an essay to have a structure and organization that a reader can both follow and find convincing, its ideas need to be split into chunks. Typically, each of those chunks gets its own paragraph. Here are several things to consider as you think about the organization of ideas and paragraphs:

- First, the chunk (the paragraph) should to be composed of a claim, pieces of evidence, and warrants that all relate *inside* the chunk. They should all have clear connections between each other and to the overall claim of that chunk.
- Second the chunks should have clear connections *between* them.
- Third, each chunk needs have a clear relationship back to the overall claim the essay is making (the thesis).

- Lastly, the chunks have to be in an order that helps the reader see the ways that the main idea gets more convincing and insightful as the essay continues.

There are many ways to improve the organization of an essay at all stages of the process, but outlining can help you decide on an order for your chunks, it can help you double-check that they all relate clearly to the main thesis, and it can also help you gain perspective on the places where you might need to make the connections between ideas clearer.

Outlines take many forms, but they all allow you to step back and look at the big picture of the essay, whether you do them early in the writing process as a way of planning or later on as a way of evaluating your essay's organization.

## Playing the "Outlining" Game

1. Review the main claim that you currently wish to use as the overall argument for your essay. If you haven't settled on a main claim yet, choose your current favorite to practice with. You can look back in your notes or on any artifacts like paper charts or shared digital documents the class created that might contain alternate positions. If you are working with a full draft of an essay, your main claim would be the thesis.
2. For each main claim you chose, come up with at least 2 or 3 smaller claims (we'll call them "subclaims") that might help prove it. If you are working with a full draft of an essay, your subclaims would be the claims made in each paragraph. If you are early in the writing process, you can write some potential claims as you go through the game.
3. Once you have your list of claims, gather together a list of the possible evidence that would support any of these claims. This evidence might be specific quotes or particular moments from the text described in your own words. You can review notes, shared digital documents, or paper charts. If you are working with the full draft of an essay, you can highlight the claims and evidence you have already incorporated. Always remember that you can review the text for more ideas by looking for items you may have marked or annotated during the reading.

4. Create a digital document or work in your notebook and begin to fill in an outline. It should look something like this (though if you are early in the writing process, you may not have all of your evidence gathered and warrants written yet):
  - Main claim (thesis):
    - Paragraph 1: Subclaim #1
      - » Evidence and Warrant
      - » Evidence and Warrant
    - Paragraph 2: Subclaim #2
      - » Evidence and Warrant
      - » Evidence and Warrant
5. As you fill in the outline, you may notice changes you want to make to some of the pieces you are organizing as you see places for more clarity. Feel free to make changes as you go.
6. Once you have a completed outline (or at least a main claim and two subclaims), choose one of these starters to complete:
  - a. Choose two paragraphs and write, “The connection between these paragraphs is...”
  - b. Choose one paragraph and write, “The connection between the main claim and this paragraph is...”
  - c. Choose the second, third, or fourth paragraph and write, “This paragraph builds on the ideas in the one before it because...”
7. A starter phrase helps you clarify your thinking. It would be clunky to include it in a final draft, so once you have your sentence or sentences, delete the starter phrase, take the ideas you generated, and see where you might include them to help make your connections clearer.

## Writing It Up

If you are early in the writing process, try writing a body paragraph or two based on your outline and starter sentences. Make sure they each have a clear connection to the main argument of the essay as well as to each other. If you are working on revising a completed draft, identify a spot where you might wish to change the order of the paragraphs or a spot where your connections could be clearer and use your starter sentence material to improve your organization.