

# **Common Ways To Organize History Papers: Process Analysis, Cause-And Effect Analysis, Comparison And Contrast, Argumentation**

UWF Writing Lab

1. Ask the journalistic questions--Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
2. Ask in-depth questions:

How did it happen? (PROCESS ANALYSIS)

Why did it happen? Or What were the results of something? (CAUSE-AND-EFFECT ANALYSIS)

How are X and Y similar or alike? How are X and Y different? (COMPARISON AND CONTRAST)

What are the pros and cons of a given subject? (ARGUMENTATION)

## PROCESS ANALYSIS

A How question suggests process analysis: a step-by-step explanation that tells how something works, how something is made, or how something occurred.

Examples: How did the spread of the Greek spirit by Philip and Alexander lay the groundwork for later cultures?

How did the United States become involved in World War I?

## Explaining How Something Happens

When you explain how steps lead to completion of a process, you answer the readers' questions in depth:

How does (did) it happen?

When and where does it happen?

What happens first, next, and so on?

What is the result?

Clarity is crucial for successful process analysis. The most effective way to explain a process is to divide it into steps and to present those steps in a clear (usually chronological) sequence. Transitional words and phrases such as first, next, after and before help to connect steps to one another. Naturally, you must be sure that no step is omitted or out of order. Also, you may sometimes have to explain why a certain step is or was necessary, especially if it is not obvious.

## Questions To Ask About Content

1. Is there a thesis sentence? If so, where?
2. What opening strategy is used to create interest?
3. Is the information adequate and appropriate for the stated purpose?
4. What specific readers' questions are answered in the body?

### Questions About Organization

1. What is the order of the body paragraphs? Is this the most effective order? Explain.
2. Is the conclusion adequate and appropriate? Explain.

### CAUSE-AND-EFFECT ANALYSIS

A Why question suggests cause-and-effect analysis: why something happened or what happens as a result of something.

Every time you try to answer a question that asks why, you engage in the process of causal analysis--you attempt to determine a cause or series of causes for a particular effect. When you try to answer a question that asks what if, you attempt to determine what effect will result from a particular cause.

There are two types of causes: immediate causes, which are readily apparent because they are closest to the effect, and ultimate causes, which, being somewhat removed, are not so apparent and perhaps even hidden.

Sound reasoning and logic are central to any causal analysis. However, because people are accustomed to thinking of causes with their effects, they sometime commit an error in logic known as the "after this, therefore because of this" fallacy (in Latin, post hoc, ergo propter hoc). This fallacy leads people to believe that because an event occurred after another event the first event somehow cause the second; that is, they sometimes make casual connections that are not proven.

From effect to cause: Why did something happen?

What caused it?

Examples: Why did the Greek experiment fail?

What events led to the Peloponnesian War?

Why did the Roman Republic collapse?

Subordinating minor ideas in cause-and-effect papers:

The following sentence structures can be corrected with subordination.

The Romans had a strong sense of family and tradition and as its consequence were especially attentive to burial ceremonies.

They had a strong sense of family and tradition: they were especially attentive to burial ceremonies.

Which point is more important? Which point can be logically subordinated? The fact that the Romans were attentive to burial ceremonies is the more important point. The reason for this attentiveness is that they had a strong sense of family and tradition. This kind of relation between two thoughts or sentences is called a causal relationship. To improve the sentences, subordinate the clauses dealing with a strong sense of family and tradition. To subordinate these clauses correctly, use a subordinating conjunction indicating a causal relationship.

Because the Romans had a strong sense of family and tradition, they were especially attentive to burial ceremonies.

(The preceding information on subordination is adapted from the UWF Writing Skills Lab handout “Subordination, Coordination, Predication.”)

#### Guidelines for effect-to-cause analysis:

1. Identify clearly the situation, the audience, and your purpose.
2. Show support that the cause fits the effect. Provide relevant examples. You might include research evidence to provide convincing support.
3. Make sure that the links between effect and cause are clear.  
Example: [distant cause]--[immediate cause]--[effect]

#### From cause to effect:

When you reason from cause to effect, you answer the readers’ questions:

What are its effect(s)?

What will happen when it’s done?

Examples: What was the effect of the pax Romana on the Mediterranean and European world?

What were the effects of the fourteenth-century disasters in Europe--namely, plague, war, social upheaval, crime, and violence?

What were the results of prohibition?

### Guidelines for cause-to-effect analysis:

1. The support must show that the events fit the cause.
2. The links between cause and effects must be clear.  
Example: [cause]--[immediate effect]--[ultimate effect]

### COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

Comparison and contrast papers ask the following questions:

How are X and Y similar or alike? (Comparison)

Example: Discuss the links between Locke and Jefferson.

How are X and Y different? (Contrast)

Example: How did absolute monarchy and constitutionalism differ from the feudal and dynastic monarchies of earlier centuries?

How are X and Y both similar and different? (Combined comparison and Contrast)

Example: Compare and contrast the religious philosophies of Martin Luther and John Calvin.

A comparison points out the ways that two or more persons, places, or things are alike. A contrast points out how they differ.

The function of any comparison or contrast is to clarify and explain. The writer's purpose may be simply to inform, or it may be to make readers aware of similarities or differences that are interesting and significant in themselves. Or, the writer may explain something unfamiliar by comparing it with something very familiar. Finally, the writer can point out the superiority of a person, place, or thing by contrasting him or her with another reigning monarch of the time.

The writer has two main options for organizing a comparison or contrast: the subject-by-subject pattern or the point-by-point pattern. For a short essay, he or she would probably follow the subject-by-subject pattern of organization where there are few points to be considered. For a somewhat longer essay, where there are numerous points to make, he or she should consider the point-by-point pattern.

A good essay of comparison and contrast tells readers something significant that they do not already know. That is, it must do more than merely point out the obvious. As a rule, therefore, writers tend to draw contrasts between things that are usually perceived as being similar or comparisons between things usually perceived as different. In fact, comparison and contrast often go together. For example, an essay about Athens and Rome might begin by showing how much they resembled each other, but end with a series of contrasts revealing how much they differed.

In selecting a topic, you should consider

- (1) what your purpose will be;
- (2) whether you will emphasize similarities or differences;
- (3) what specific points you will discuss; and
- (4) what organizational pattern will best suit your purpose.

Guidelines:

1. Only items in the same general class can be compared or contrasted. Items with nothing in common provide no logical basis for comparison or contrast.
2. The comparison rests on a clear and definite basis: philosophies (primary beliefs), benefits, appearance, results, habits, function in society, etc.
3. A comparison or contrast shows likenesses or differences in order to make a point. Depending on your purpose, your main point may be that X is better than Y, that one philosophy is more encompassing (better received, etc.) than another.
4. Both parts of the comparison or contrast receive equal treatment. Points discussed for one item are also discussed (or implied) for the other, generally in the same order.
5. The comparison or contrast is supported and clarified through examples. Similarities and differences are shown through concrete, specific, and relevant examples.
6. A comparison or contrast follows either a block (vertical) pattern or a point-by-point pattern. In the block pattern, first one item is discussed fully, then the next. A block pattern is preferable when the overall picture is more important than the individual points.

In the point-by-point pattern, one point about both items is discussed, then the next point, and so on. A point-by-point pattern is preferable when specific points might be hard to remember unless placed side by side.

Block pattern

Item A  
 first point  
 second point  
 third point, etc.

Item B  
 first point  
 second point  
 third point

Point-by-point pattern

first point of A  
 first point of B, etc.

second point of A  
 second point of B, etc.

ARGUMENTATION

Argumentation is the attempt to persuade a reader to accept the writer's point of view, to make a decision, or to pursue a particular course of action.

There are two basic types of argumentation: logical and persuasive. In logical argumentation, the writer appeals to the reader's rational or intellectual facilities to convince him or her of the truth of a particular statement or belief. In persuasive argumentation, on the other hand, the writer appeals to the reader's emotions and opinions to move the reader to action. These two arguments, however, are seldom found in their pure forms.

Argument focuses on its audience. It may ask them to accept an opinion, to support a position, or to take action or to change their behavior. But because it calls for varying degrees of involvement, an argument provokes resistance from its readers.

Examples: Was or was not Stalin taken in by Hitler in the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939?

Was Metternich a reactionary egotist or an intelligent conservative?

Was Napoleon a great man or a failed dictator?

Somewhere near the beginning of your argumentative paper, identify the issue to be discussed, explain why you think it is important, and point out what interest you and your readers share in the issue.

Making a good argument does the following:

1. Presents a main point or claim that the audience finds debatable. Always state your arguable point directly and clearly as a thesis. Let readers know exactly where you stand.
2. Offers convincing support for the claim. To ensure that your argument is legitimate, offer convincing reasons, choose reliable sources of information, distinguish objective from subjective evidence, and avoid drawing specious conclusions--conclusions based on subjective evidence or sweeping generalities.
3. Appeals to the audience's reason. Readers expect you to complete a version of this statement:

My position is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

Argument always relies on some combination--description, narration, and exposition. Many persuasive arguments, however, are built around one or both of these reasoning patterns: induction (reasoning from specific evidence to a general conclusion) and deduction (applying a proven generalization to a specific case.)

In argumentation, offer objective evidence. Evidence is any information that supports your claim. Common types of objective evidence include statistics, examples, and expert testimony. Choose reliable sources.

In addition to offering objective evidence, appeal to shared goals with values. If you hope to make contact with your audience, you have to identify at least one goal you and your audience have in common: “What do we both want most?” Always place yourself in the audience’s position. Think about reasons they will find important--reasons that might very well differ from those you find important.

4. Appeals to the audience’s emotions (as appropriate).
5. Exhibits a clear and unmistakable line of thought. A well-constructed argument avoids logical fallacies, flaws in the reasoning that will render the argument invalid.

Avoid these common logical fallacies:

Oversimplification.

Hasty generalization.

Post hoc. ergo propter hoc (“After this, therefore because of this”).

Begging the question.

False analogy.

Either/or thinking.

Non sequitur (“It does not follow”).

Standard shape of an argument:

Introduction (Attracts and invites your readers and provides a forecast)

Body (Offers the support and refutation)

Conclusion (Sums up your case and makes a direct appeal)

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