

Match the Best Form of Organization to Your Speech

Brief: Good organization is the key to effective communication because it helps make your ideas accessible to your audience.

Learning Objective: Identify the best form of organization for a particular speech topic.

How to Choose?

What's your topic? When you think about your topic, does a way of organizing your main points seem obvious to you? Or, is the best choice of organization not so obvious? If so, review the types of organization below for advice regarding how to choose a form of organization that best fits your purpose.

Topical Organization

One way to know if topical organization is an appropriate approach is to consider whether your subject matter can be divided into categories. With some topics, you have the option of deciding the categories that matter the most to you. For example, if your topic is wine, you might focus on food pairings and break your organization into general categories such as white, rosé, and red. Or, you could choose to focus on production and create categories by country of origin such as domestic, French, Italian, and Chilean.

In other cases, topics might be bound by established categories. For example, if your topic is "Choosing the best dog breed for you," you would want to refer to the American Kennel Club's official list of recognized breeds.

Chronological Organization

If your topic explains a process that takes place across a specifically defined period of time—such as the steps to take to prepare, bake, and decorate a cake—you'll want to use chronological organization. Topics that tell the audience how to do something rely on the audience's ability to track every step across time using time relevant transitional words such as first, second, next, and finally.

Chronological organization can also be effective if you're sharing someone's biography or if you're explaining something historical in nature.

Spatial Organization

If understanding your topic relies on the description of a large structure that contains multiple sections, dimensions, or layers, such as a naval aircraft carrier or the Louvre Museum, then spatial organization might be the right choice for you.

When preparing to create your spatial organization, it's always helpful to use a visual representation of the structure you're describing. Spatially related transitional words such as at the left, towards the middle, on the top, at the right are important verbal markers.



Louvre Museum in Paris, France

Comparative Organization

Is your topic best understood by comparing one thing to another, assessing similarities and differences? When preparing to create your comparative organization, it can be helpful to select the criteria that will serve as the basis of your comparison. Then, create a chart that reflects those criteria to use as your organizational structure.

Problem-Solution Organization

Is the main focus of your speech a problem that you care about solving? In that case, using the problem-solution organization, which involves the identification of a problem followed by a possible solution, may be your best choice.

Causal Organization

Do you want to inform your audience about how one thing or a group of factors caused something else to happen? Similar to a problem-solution speech, a causal speech informs audience members about causes and effects that have created certain outcomes.

From Concept to Action

When you're organizing your main points, ask yourself a few questions. What's your topic? If the best choice of organization is not so obvious, review the types of organization one by one and try to create a quick outline. Some of the forms probably won't work at all. With others, you may be able to create a partial outline. That will likely leave one or two forms of organizations that could work. Of those that work, which will likely be best for your purposes?

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

"Louvre Pyramid Paris Tourism France Museum Arts." Pixabay. <https://pixabay.com/photos/louvre-pyramid-paris-tourism-102840/>
Accessed 30 April 2019. [CC0]

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