Organization

I look back and forth and see potential endings and titles and leads.
I'm looking for a trail through the material I have...

-Donald Murray

Without a clear trail, your ideas collapse or crash into each other. It is the organization that gives your writing direction and it helps the reader move through the ideas in a purposeful way.

Begin with a strong lead so you hook the reader right off the bat. Don't settle for "Once upon a time" or "My paper is all about dogs." Think about your lead working like a fishing lure or fly that dangles right in front of the nose of the fish until it just can't resist and takes a big, committed bite. Ahhh, gotcha!

If you take a look at your whole piece of writing, it should carefully build to the most important moment or point you are trying to make. Toss your reader interesting details that work like stepping stones--each getting the reader closer and closer to the key idea or event.

The order of your details is really important, too. Ideas shouldn't dive-bomb the reader out of the blue; they should come at just the right time to help the reader understand. Everything needs to fit together with a strong connecting line back to the main idea.

Watch out for getting bogged down in trivial details (what color the hero's socks were, or whether she had milk on her cereal). Keep moving right along. And when you reach the end of the story or make your last point, STOP! Make that last sentence count by leaving the reader with something to think about. Good endings are tough, but don't fall into the pit with "And I woke up and it was only a dream," or "Now you know the three reasons why Americans should car pool." Readers won't feel satisfied with these endings and neither will you.

Organization is the Hardest Trait.

--K-12 Student Writers Across America
Organization

Paper - Clear and Compelling Direction
I've chosen an order that works well and makes the reader want to find out what's coming next.

- My beginning gets the reader's attention and gives clues about what is coming.
- Every detail adds a little more to the main idea or story.
- All my details are in the right place; everything fits like a puzzle.
- I ended at a good spot and didn't drag on too long. I left my reader with something to think about.

Paper - Some Really Smooth Parts, Others Need Work
The order of my story/paper makes sense most of the time.

- I have a beginning, but it really doesn't grab you or give clues about what is coming.
- Sometimes it is not clear how the details I have used connect to the main idea or story.
- Some of my details are in the right spot, but some should come earlier or later.
- I've lingered too long in some places, and sped through others.
- I have a conclusion, it just isn't the way I want it yet. I may have gone on too long or just tried to sum up in a haphazard way.

Paper - Not Shaped Yet
The order in my paper is jumbled and confused. I'm feeling dizzy!

- There isn't really a beginning or ending to my paper. It just kinda 'takes off...'
- I'm confused about how the details fit with the main idea or story.
- My ideas seem scrambled, jumbled and disconnected. It's confusing.
- Conclusion? Oops, I forgot.
ORGANIZATION

5 The organization enhances and showcases the central idea or storyline. The order, structure or presentation of information is compelling and moves the reader through the text.

- Details seem to fit where they’re placed; sequencing is logical and effective.
- An inviting introduction draws the reader in; a satisfying conclusion leaves the reader with a sense of resolution.
- Pacing is well controlled; the writer knows when to slow down and elaborate, and when to pick up the pace and move on.
- Thoughtful transitions clearly show how ideas connect.
- Organization flows so smoothly the reader hardly thinks about it.

3 The organizational structure is strong enough to move the reader through the text without undue confusion.

- The paper has a recognizable introduction and conclusion. The introduction may not create a strong sense of anticipation; the conclusion may not tie up all loose ends.
- Sequencing is usually logical, but may sometimes be so predictable that the structure takes attention away from the content.
- Pacing is fairly well controlled, though the writer sometimes spurts ahead too quickly or spends too much time on details that do not matter.
- Transitions often work well; at other times, connections between ideas are fuzzy.
- The organization sometimes supports the main point or storyline; at other times, the reader feels an urge to slip in a transition or move things around.
The writing lacks a clear sense of direction. Ideas, details or events seem strung together in a loose or random fashion—or else there is no identifiable internal structure. The writing reflects more than one of these problems:

- Sequencing needs work.
- There is no real lead to set up what follows, no real conclusion to wrap things up.
- Pacing feels awkward; the writer slows to a crawl when the reader wants to get on with it, and vice versa.
- Connections between ideas are confusing or missing.
- Problems with organization make it hard for the reader to get a grip on the main point or storyline.