



## Organizational Patterns for Speeches

**Advice:** Before entering your main ideas, select the type of organizational pattern that best matches your topic and purpose.

An organizational pattern is a concrete way to structure your speech. Choose the pattern that best fits your topic and that your audience can easily follow.

**Causal/Cause-Effect** arranges speech points to demonstrate that a particular set of circumstances (causes) leads to a specific result (effects) or, conversely, that various results (effects) follow from a particular set of circumstances (causes)

Sometimes a topic can be discussed in terms of multiple causes for a single effect or a single cause of multiple effects.

*Example:*

TOPIC: College drop-outs.

PURPOSE: To explain why some college students drop out.

THESIS: Several factors contribute to some students' dropping out of college.

- I. Lack of funds (Cause 1)
- II. Unsatisfactory social life (Cause 2)
- III. Unsatisfactory academic performance (Cause 3)
- IV. All of the above contribute to the decision to drop out. (Effect)

**Chronological/Temporal** describes a series of developments in time or a set of actions occurring sequentially.

This organizational pattern follows the natural sequential order of main points. Useful for topics that describe a series of events in time or explain the steps in a process.

*Example:*

TOPIC: The history of the Internet.

PURPOSE: To track the evolution of the present-day Internet.



THESIS: The Internet evolved from a small network designed for academic scientists into a vast system of networks used by billions of people around the globe.

- I. The Internet was first conceived in 1962 as the ARPANET to promote the sharing of research among scientists in the United States.
- II. In the 1980s a team created TCP/IP, a language that could link networks, and the Internet as we know it was born.
- III. In 1989, Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web.
- IV. At the end of the Cold War, the ARPANET was decommissioned and the World Wide Web made up the bulk of Internet traffic.
- V. In 2014, the Internet celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, with 3 billion people connected worldwide.

**Comparative Advantage** shows how your viewpoint or proposal is superior to one or more alternative viewpoints or proposals. This is most effective when your audience is already aware of the issue or problem and agrees that a need for a solution (or an alternative view) exists. Because listeners are alert to the issue, you don't have to spend time establishing its existence. Instead, you can proceed directly to favorably comparing your position with the alternatives.

In order to maintain your credibility, make sure to identify alternatives that your audience is familiar with and ones supported by opposing interests. If you omit familiar alternatives, your listeners will wonder if you are fully informed on the topic and become skeptical of your comparative alternative as well as your credibility.

The final step in a comparative advantage speech is to drive home the unique advantages of your option relative to competing options with brief but compelling evidence

*Example:*

TOPIC: Controlling the deer population.

PURPOSE: To convince my audience that controlling the deer population through a combination of hunting and contraception is superior to a strategy of fencing, hunting, or contraception alone.



THESIS: Rather than hunting, fencing, or contraception alone, the best way to reduce the deer population is by a dual strategy of hunting and contraception.

- I. **(Advantage of my solution over alternative #1.)** A combination strategy is superior to hunting alone because many areas are too densely populated by humans to prevent hunting; in such cases contraceptive darts and vaccines can address the problem.
- II. **(Advantage over alternative #2.)** A combination strategy is superior to relying solely on fencing because fencing is far too expensive for widespread use.
- III. **(Advantage over alternative #3.)** A dual strategy is superior to relying only on contraception because only a limited number of deer are candidates for contraceptive darts and vaccines.

**Monroe's Motivated Sequence** is a five-step process that begins with arousing listeners' attention and ends with calling for action.

Step 1: *Attention* — address listeners' core concerns, making the speech highly relevant to them.

Step 2: *Need* — show listeners that they have an important need that must be satisfied or a problem that must be solved.

Step 3: *Satisfaction* — introduce your proposed solution.

Step 4: *Visualization* — provide listeners with a vision of anticipated outcomes associated with the solution.

Step 5: *Action* — make a direct request of listeners that involves changing or strengthening their present way of thinking or acting.

*Example:*

TOPIC: The need for organ donors.

PURPOSE: To convince my audience to consider becoming organ donors.

THESIS: Donating an organ is a simple step you can take that will literally give life to others—to your husband or wife, mother or father, son or daughter—or to a beautiful child whom you've never met.

- I. **(Get audience's attention.)** Many of us are willing, but if we don't take



the proper steps, our organs go unused.

- II. (*Demonstrate need.*) According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, there are approximately 80,000 people on the waiting list for an organ transplant.
- III. (*Propose a solution.*) There are two steps to become an organ donor: Fill out a donor card or add a note to your driver's license and notify your family of your decision.
- IV. (*Show audience how solution will benefit them.*) Tell the story of how Nicholas Green's organs helped seven people and increased organ donations in Italy.
- V. (*Call for action.*) Say yes to organ donation on your donor card and/or driver's license and discuss your decision with your family.

**Narrative** consists of a story or a series of short stories replete with characters, settings, plot, and vivid imagery. Using a dramatic situation can help illustrate your point, but you may need to incorporate elements of other organizational patterns, such as the chronological or causal patterns, in order to give your speech shape.

*Example:*

TOPIC: How I became a writer.

PURPOSE: To tell my audience the story of how I achieved my goal.

THESIS: Becoming a writer seemed like an impossible dream, but with talent, perseverance, and a positive attitude, I made that dream come true. I have always written, even when I was very young.

- I. A college professor pushed me to explore more sophisticated characters and themes.
- II. When I began sending out stories, I received rejection after rejection.
- III. My first novel, too, was rejected.
- IV. Even though I was disappointed, I didn't stop writing.
- V. Eventually, after years of trying, I was signed on by a major publishing house and could afford to write full time.



**Problem-Solution** organizes speech points to demonstrate the nature and significance of a problem and then provide justification for a proposed solution:

- I. Problem (define what it is)
- II. Solution (offer a way to overcome the problem)

**Problem-Cause-Solution** Many problem-solution speeches require more than two points to adequately explain the problem and to substantiate the recommended solution.

Arrange speech points in order to demonstrate problem, reasons for problem, and solution to problem:

- I. The nature of the problem (define what it is)
- II. Reasons for the problem (explain why it's a problem, for whom, etc.)
- III. Unsatisfactory solutions (discuss those that have not worked)  
(*optional step*)
- IV. Proposed solution (explain why it's expected to work)

*Example:*

TOPIC: The NBA draft's effect on young athletes.

PURPOSE: To persuade my audience that the NBA draft should be changed so that young athletes are no longer tempted to throw away their chances to get an education.

THESIS: The NBA draft should be changed so that athletes like you aren't tempted to throw away an opportunity to get an education.

- I. (*Need/problem*) The NBA draft should be revamped so that college athletes are not tempted to drop out of school.
- II. (*Reasons for the problem*) The NBA's present policies lure young athletes to pursue unrealistic goals of superstardom while weakening the quality of the game with immature players.
- III. (*Solution to the problem*) The NBA draft needs to adopt a minimum



age of 20.

- IV. (*Evidence of the solution's feasibility*) National leagues in countries X and Y have done this successfully.

**Refutation** addresses each main point and then refutes (disproves) an opposing claim to your position.

The aim here is to bolster your own position by disproving the opposing claim. This pattern can effectively address competing arguments. Refutation is a favorite tool of political candidates, who use it to strengthen their position on an issue and debunk the position taken by the opposing candidate.

If done well, refutation may influence audience members who either disagree with you or are conflicted about where they stand.

Note that it is important to refute *strong* rather than *weak* objections to the claim, since refuting weak objections won't sway the audience. Further, it is probably best to use this pattern when you are confident that the opposing argument is weak and vulnerable to attack.

Main points arranged in a refutation pattern follow a format similar to this:

*MAIN POINT I:* State the opposing position.

*MAIN POINT II:* Describe the implications or ramifications of the opposing claim.

*MAIN POINT III:* Offer arguments and evidence for your position.

*MAIN POINT IV:* Contrast your position with the opposing claim to drive home the superiority of your position.

*Example:*

TOPIC: Increased energy conservation vs. drilling for oil in Alaska.



**PURPOSE:** To convince my audience that, rather than drilling for oil in the ANWAR, we should maintain the refuge's protected status and focus instead on conserving energy.

**THESIS:** Rather than drilling for oil in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWAR), we should focus on energy conservation measures as a way of lessening our dependence on foreign oil.

- I. (*Describe opposing claims.*) Proponents claim that drilling in the Arctic refuge is the only way to increase our energy independence, that it will have little negative impact on the environment, and that if we don't take this step our reliance on foreign energy will only increase.
- II. (*Describe implications and ramifications of opposing claims.*) By claiming that drilling in the refuge is the only solution to our reliance on foreign energy, proponents of this solution sidestep the need for stricter energy conservation policies as well as the need to protect one of the last great pristine lands.
- III. (*Offer arguments and evidence for your position, as developed in subpoints.*) The massive construction needed to access the tundra will disturb the habitat of thousands of species and shift the focus from energy conservation to increased energy consumption, when the focus should be the reverse.
- IV. (*Contrast your position with the opposition's to drive home the superiority of yours.*) The opposition's plan would encourage consumption while also endangering the environment; my plan would encourage stricter energy conservation while protecting one of the world's few remaining wildernesses.

**Spatial** arranges the main points in order of their physical proximity or direction relative to each other. Useful when the purpose of your speech is to describe or explain the physical arrangement of a place, a scene, an object, or an entity such as a company (e.g., where its different branches are located).

*Example:*

**TOPIC:** El Morro National Monument in New Mexico.



**PURPOSE:** To give my audience a sense of why El Morro is a worthwhile place to visit.

**THESIS:** El Morro National Monument in New Mexico is captivating for its variety of natural and historical landmarks.

- I. Visitors first encounter an abundant variety of plant life native to the high-country desert.
- II. Soon visitors come upon an age-old watering hole that has receded beneath the 200-foot cliffs.
- III. Beyond are the famous cliff carvings made by hundreds of travelers over several centuries of exploration in the Southwest.
- IV. At the farthest reaches of the magnificent park are the ancient ruins of a pueblo dwelling secured high atop "the Rock."

**Topical/Categorical** presents categories of a main topic. Useful when your main points are of equal or almost equal importance.

This organizational pattern stresses natural divisions in a topic, in which points can be moved to emphasize audience needs and interests.

*Example:*

**TOPIC:** Choosing Chicago as a place to establish a career.

**PURPOSE:** To show my audience why Chicago is a great place to start a career.

**THESIS:** Chicago is an excellent place to establish a career.

- I. Accessible transportation
- II. Cultural variety
- III. Economic stability