

Writing - Composition

1. The paragraph is the basic unit of composition.

A paragraph corresponds to a unit of thought

- an argument; a reason; an introduction; a conclusion
- usually 7-14 lines (90%range= 4-20 lines)
- should be varied somewhat

Each paragraph should make one point. No more.

Each paragraph should make a complete point. No less.

When a reason is complex, paragraph = reason.

- in a scientific argument, reasons can be very complex
- if so, each paragraph is a **component** of the reason

Cf: **Discourse plan** - formulates individual thoughts

2. Order your points.

a. Introduction. Set the stage.

- make your intentions clear (what your goal is)
- don't need to explain all the steps; just give general idea (sets up the schema)
- keep it brief

b. Give your points one at a time.

- don't mix reasons
- don't return to previous points
- keep terms consistent

c. Conclusion. What should your reader believe.

- implications for other aspects of their life

3. More generally: Tell a good story.

As much as possible, write as if telling a story.

- a. Introduction. Set up the scene.
 - introduce main characters (ideas)
 - set up context (main issues; usually just one)
- b. Action. Get things moving.
 - lay out the issues - the beliefs you want people to adopt
 - provide an argument that will convince them
 - bring in evidence, value statements, logic, etc
- c. Resolution. Wrap things up.
 - state the take-home message (repeat)
 - connections to other areas, future work, etc.

4. Process: Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite.

- a. Get started. Just write something.
 - don't worry about content
 - don't worry about style
 - don't worry - be happy

b. Rewrite : focus *locally*, and evolve

- could each **sentence** be improved?
 - could it better capture your thought?
 - could terms be improved? (less ambiguity, etc)
 - could the style be improved?
 - could the sentence be moved to a better location?
- don't be afraid be afraid to throw out a word if need be
- once this is done, examine again
 - may also need to re-examine local structure(s)
- goals: **clarity & conciseness**

Cf: **Sentence plan** - formulates individual sentences

c. Rewrite : focus *slightly higher*, and evolve

- could each **paragraph** be improved?
 - could it better capture your thought?
 - is usage of terms consistent enough?
 - could the overall style be improved?
 - could the paragraph be moved to a better location?
- don't be afraid be afraid to throw out a sentence if need be
- once this is done, examine again
 - may also need to re-examine local structure(s)
- goals: **clarity & conciseness**

Cf: **Discourse plan** - formulates individual thoughts

d. Rewrite : focus *slightly higher*, and evolve

- could each **section** be improved?
 - could it better capture your thought?
 - is usage of terms consistent enough?
 - could the overall style be improved?
 - could the section be moved to a better location?
- don't be afraid be afraid to throw out a paragraph if need be
- once this is done, examine again
 - may also need to re-examine local structure(s)
- goals: **clarity & conciseness**

e. Rewrite : focus *globally*, and evolve

- could each **chapter** be improved?
 - could it better capture your thought?
 - is usage of terms consistent enough?
 - could the overall style be improved?
 - could the chapter be moved to a better location?
- don't be afraid be afraid to throw out a section if need be
- once this is done, examine again
 - may also need to re-examine local structure(s)
- goals: **clarity & conciseness**

Etc, etc

- f. Set aside, and re-examine later
 - gives you better perspective

Presentation - Elevator Pitches

1. Format your *graphics* correctly.

Not entirely standardized, but stylistic constraints exist...

- Use a dark background (e.g., black, dark blue)
 - light fonts
- Use colours distinguishable by colour-blind people
 - <http://vischeck.com/vischeck/vischeckImage.php>
- Keep elements static
 - animate your body, not your graphic elements
- Keep to a uniform colour scheme
 - use at least a bit of colour (don't have everything be B/W)

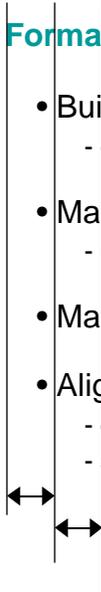
2. Format your *fonts* correctly.

Not entirely standardized, but stylistic constraints exist...

- **Font \geq 20 point** (easier to read)
 - ideally, 24pt
 - never smaller than 16pt (Here's a sentence in 16pt) (Here's one in 12pt.)
- **Use common, sans serif fonts** (easier to read)
 - e.g. Arial
- **Don't use large mismatches of font size**
 - ideally, factor of 2 at each level
- **Keep to a uniform font scheme**
 - both in typeface and size

3. Format your *points* correctly.

- **Build each main point, one at a time**
 - either a single line, or a related cluster
- **Maximum four points; ideally, three points (rule of three)**
 - maybe five sometimes, **but only in emergencies**
- **Maximum two levels of structure in a point**
- **Align all points**
 - different alignment lines reflect structure
 - same distance = same difference of structural level



4. Use images on occasion.

- Useful for illustrating a point
 - provides concrete example
 - can be just for fun :-)
- Should be accompanied by text
 - in the background
 - should not obscure the text
- Location: wherever it works
 - doesn't have to be in the middle
 - play around with various locations
 - try for alignment (when possible)



5. Pace yourself.

- Speak at moderate pace
 - do not rush
- Synchronize slides and speech
 - do not rush
- If pressed for time, omit less important parts
 - do not rush

6. Order your points so as to *tell a story*.

0. Title
 - title of presentation
 - your name; course number; date
1. The situation (the problem)
 - why this is important, etc
2. Major point #1
 - something relevant, and why
3. Major point #2 (etc)
 - something relevant, and why
4. Summary
 - recap what you've presented & why it's important