

The Genuine Article: A Guide to the Structure and a Method for Outlining Scholarly Arguments

Main Structure Overview:

Most journal articles and research papers consist of **4 to 5 main sections:**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Background**
- 3. Main Argument**
- 4. Counterargument or Concession (if necessary)**
- 5. Conclusion**

Introductions and Conclusions:

While each section can contain multiple subsections, Intros and Conclusions tend to be single paragraphs. **Intros and Conclusions also have their own unique shapes that are something like a funnel and an inverted funnel, respectively.**

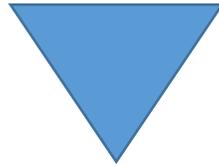
Introductions:

For an Intro, you want to **begin with a Hook** that catches your readers' attention and pulls in a wide range of readers who might not otherwise be interested in your topic. That hook can be a fact, statistic, quote, or short narrative. I usually look for the most interesting or outrageous fact or quote I can find and begin there. **Following that quote, you will want to spend 2-3 sentences tying that hook to the larger topic of your paper.** Once you have introduced that larger topic, **spend another 2-3 sentences narrowing it down to the specific focus of your paper.** At that point, you will **then offer a thesis statement that consists of a Claim and Because Statement. The Claim functions as the "I believe" portion of your thesis,¹ and the Because Statement lists—in the order with which you will discuss them—the reasons why or the support you have for that belief.** In short, your Thesis should, in one or two sentences, cut to the heart of your paper while also providing a roadmap of the way your argument will progress.

By following this process, you will, hopefully, catch the attention of a wide range of readers and then walk them slowly through a generalized topic with which they are familiar so they are then acclimated and possibly interested in the more specific and focused topic of your paper.

¹ You probably will not actually write "I believe" as you want to seem certain and as though you are presenting facts rather than opinion

Introduction Diagram:



1. Hook (Large Audience)
2. Transition to Generalized Topic
3. Introduce Specific Topic
4. Offer Thesis Statement

Here is **an example Introduction** written by a freshman in one of my undergraduate Writing and Rhetoric courses:

“The Pandemic of Poverty: A United States Size Cure”

Mother Teresa once said, “When a poor person dies of hunger it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give that person what he or she needed” (goodreads.com 6). The people around the world who live within the ruins of their own country and inhabit ramshackle homes that may collapse on them any day cannot improve their circumstances on their own. In fact, neglecting those citizens essentially strips them of any hope for survival. According to Mother Teresa, we are all obligated to help those who cannot help themselves. More specifically, America’s privileged, modernized culture provides us with the capability to aid hurting countries. Thus, the United States and its citizens hold an obligation to help countries in need because our higher education, technological advancements, and financial status set us apart from other nations and enable us to improve the lives of others in our world.

Note how the author deliberately moves through the four steps of an Introduction. **To begin, she uses a quote by a well-known figure** who should be familiar to most readers and whose religious background and history of directly helping those in need provides her with a tremendous amount of credibility on the issue being introduced. **Next, she introduces the general topic** of poverty and how it begets more poverty. She also cleverly uses **visual imagery here to create sympathy for her subject** by making it concrete. From there, **she introduces her main topic** and even uses the introductory clause of “specifically” to do so. Lastly, she offers a clear thesis that includes both a claim and a “because statement” that outlines—in order—the topics of the argument that will follow.

Generally, **legal papers and articles also include a second introductory paragraph** that follows that standard introduction and offers a more detailed overview of the paper’s structure and topics. **Typically, this second paragraph will follow a simple structure that first introduces the individuals sections by numerical order and then identifies that subject**

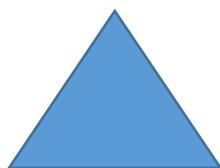
matter covered in that section. For example, a typical paragraph of this nature might begin with something like the following:

Part I of this article explains the origins of the opioid epidemic as well as the government's response to it, emphasizing that the current drug crisis has hit white people and white communities the hardest and, further, that pregnant women have not been immune from it. Part II explores how the State has responded to substance use during pregnancy. At times, the State has responded with its civil systems, choosing to involve the child welfare system and child protective services; at other times, it has responded with its criminal systems, choosing to arrest and prosecute women for using substances while pregnant.

Conclusions:

Conclusions, on the other hand, almost literally invert the Intro's structure by beginning with the Because Statement and then repeating the Claim so as to remind readers of what they just read and what it worked to prove. Following the reversed restatement of your Thesis, **spend 2-3 sentences opening up the discussion to a larger topic and then, finally, rather than offering or repeating a Hook, place your argument in a larger context that will leave your readers thinking about your paper long after they've read it—** which is the sign of an effective piece of writing. My method is to suggest what might happen next or what larger ramifications might come if people do or do not actually listen to your argument and follow your advice. Often, a good paper will need to focus so intently on a single topic that it may interest only the expert. By opening with a larger topic and hook in your Introduction, you pull in a larger audience, and by suggesting in your conclusion the greater relevance of your topic, you allow your argument to apply to a wider range of readers.

Conclusion Diagram:



1. Specific Because Statement and Claim
2. Specific Topic
3. General Topic
4. Greater Relevance

Below is **an example Conclusion** from the same paper as above:

The United States of America's higher education, technological advancements, and financial status prove its capability to fulfill its obligation to care for the less fortunate and affluent areas of the world. The United States possesses the ability to make differences in the lives of those devastated people in our world, but that change must begin with individuals. As Americans, each citizen of our great country has the power to create the kind of change that, when assembled with others, could potentially end world poverty. One individual who demands change can transform the lives of citizens who have little-to-no food, clothing, or shelter. While such actions may begin with the most altruistic of intentions, ending world poverty and helping others to stand on their own would not only improve the lives

of those immediately affected, but also would increase that population's ability to then contribute to the global economy and both medical and environmental research as well. In our modern society, we are more connected than ever to the rest of the world, and when one of us struggles, we all struggle. Helping those in need is not only the right thing to do for them, but also for ourselves and the planet we share.

Again, note how the author deliberately moves backwards through the steps of an Introduction. She starts by deliberately reminding her audience of the topics of her argument in the order that she discussed them and then restates the claim of her argument that those topics hopefully just proved reasonable. Next, she returns to the specific focus of her paper, which is that America has the capability of helping poorer nations and change must begin with individuals. From there, she again uses specific details to make her subject of her concrete or real for her readers.

Background and Main Argument (Evidence-Based Body Paragraphs):

Background sections, then, provide your readers with all the necessary information they need to understand your argument, which usually includes providing a scholarly context for your argument. The background is where you outline and discuss the existent scholarship on your topic. That discussion, then, not only allows you to illustrate the depth of your research and familiarity with that scholarship but also provides you with the opportunity to discuss how your argument meaningfully adds to that scholarship. What gap in that preexisting scholarship does your paper fill, or how does your paper rethink established ideas and arguments regarding your topic? Also, even though you are providing background, do remember that you are always arguing, so try to present that background information in such a way as to set the stage for your argument. **The Main Argument, on the other hand, is exactly what it sounds like: the section where you lay out your beliefs and the facts you have to support them.** Both of these sections consist of Body Paragraphs, and **for Body Paragraphs, I use the PEAS method:**

P = Point

E = Evidence

A = Analysis

S = So What?

Now, the first rule of paragraphing is **One Paragraph = One Idea.**² That idea may be big or small, but you can only discuss one point, idea, subject, or topic at a time.

For the P, offer a Topic Sentence that immediately and directly introduces the one idea on which your paragraph will focus. Often writers need a little time to warm up, and they will wander into their main idea, which actually comes in the third sentence of the paragraph rather than the first. While such a practice can annoy readers who value their time as much as you value yours, not beginning your paragraph with an accurate and direct topic sentence can

² In class, I usually make a bad *Fight Club* joke here that the first rule of paragraphing is you do not talk about paragraphing. You may also use it at your own risk as it usually bombs, but I cannot resist.

also confuse readers who do not know what pieces of information actually matter. You need to focus your topic so your reader can follow you and your argument. If you do not know what your paragraph is actually about, no one will. I want my topic sentences to be both accurate and inclusive. By accurate, I mean they should introduce the actual topic on which that paragraph focuses, and by inclusive, I mean they should also introduce the full scope of information offered by that topic.

For the E, provide some perceivable evidence or a fact regarding the topic of that paragraph. In other words, let your readers perceive or experience the idea that your topic sentence introduces. As a lawyer, you should be more aware than most that only facts can establish the validity of opinions, so you need to provide a fact that somehow proves or speaks to the point you want to make in each paragraph. That evidence can be a statistic, fact, description, or quote. Make certain your evidence comes from a reputable source and introduce that evidence as coming from that source so you can gain the credibility of a careful researcher who only cites more credible experts or verified and, ideally, peer-reviewed sources. Do be wary of over quoting, though. Quote when your source is an expert on the matter under discussion or the quote expresses the matter perfectly. Otherwise, try to paraphrase because doing so will make you look like the expert; also, readers tend to skip over long quotes, which then undercuts the value of the quote.

Once you have let your readers see your topic, spend 2-3 sentences pointing out what you want them to see in that Evidence; to what do you want to draw their attention? Those 2–3 sentences are where you tell your readers what you want them to notice about that evidence or what details in that evidence matter to your argument. In fact, telling your readers how they should or how you want them to interpret the fact you just offered is your **Analysis**. This portion of the paragraph is extremely important because readers believe facts are inalterable, but a good writer knows that the interpretation of fact depends on perspective, and the Analysis section is where you show your readers what you believe is the correct perspective for understanding the fact or facts you provide.

Finally, then, tell your reader why you want them to notice the details in your Evidence that you isolate in your Analysis. Why did you bring up the topic on which this paragraph focuses in the first place? How does it contribute to your argument? **In other words, when you finish with your Analysis, imagine your reader asking you, “So What?”** Not every paragraph needs to tie immediately to your main conclusion, but it should point directly to one of the reasons you list as support for the major claim of your argument—and this holds true for your background paragraphs as well. Each argument should have a **Thesis Statement** that consists of a main claim, which is the “I believe” portion (though you will often drop the words “I believe” from it), and a “because” statement that lists your support for that argument. Thus, each paragraph need not jump directly to your claim, but it should point immediately to one of the elements of your “because” statement.³

³ To explain this relationship between each paragraph and one’s main argument, I often refer to the concept of “six degrees of separation” (or “six degrees of Kevin Bacon” if more relatable), which is based on the premise that any person (or Kevin Bacon) can be linked to any other person through no more than six acquaintance links. I then tell my students that each paragraph should be within one to two links or degrees from one of the items listed in their “because” statements.

Below is an **example Background** paragraph that follows the PEAS structure (I have labelled the different sections with brackets):

[P] Even at historical moments when the United States found itself struggling, other countries faced much greater hardships. [E] From December 2007 to June 2009, the Great Recession took place in the United States. According to the *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, a collection of articles containing in-depth research on economic development, the labor market conditions in the United States during the Great Recession were the worst on record since the late 1940s (Espy, Hobijn, and Sahin 2). Cutbacks in consumer spending led to a collapse in business investments and national employment percentages declined drastically. To point, the average working-age household income decreased from \$61,574 to \$55,276 between the years 2000 and 2010, and the single greatest plummet occurred in the two years of The Great Recession with an average \$2,700 decline in the average worker’s income. [A] Despite the harshness of those losses, The World Bank recorded the yearly household income for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2010 as averaging a mere \$7,428. While The United States considered the Great Recession as having devastating effects on workers’ income, the incomes in struggling regions hardly qualified as livable. [S] Much like the past, then, countries around the world still face greater financial struggles than the United States, and even when we struggle, we still have the means to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

And below are **two consecutive example Main Argument paragraphs** that also follow the PEAS structure for Body Paragraphs. Note how they proceed according to the order of the Thesis (“Thus, the United States and its citizens hold an obligation to help countries in need because our higher education, technological advancements, and financial status set us apart from other nations and enable us to improve the lives of others in our world.”) with a paragraph on “higher education” coming first and then a paragraph on “technological advancements.”

The United States of America’s educational system functions as an essential aspect of its continued economic success and ability to provide a high standard for its citizen’s quality of life. According to the article, “Higher education and knowledge for nation-state development: The role of the world bank and U.S. universities in poverty reduction in the developing world,” which provides an analysis of several case studies linking higher education to reductions in poverty, countries without an infrastructure for advanced education often lack any opportunity to create solutions for local and global issues (Collins 12). Whereas the United States has developed a sophisticated educational infrastructure that allows its students to then successfully enter and influence the national economy, the citizens of impoverished countries cannot actively participate in their local economies due to a lack of educational preparation. A duty of the United States, therefore, not only includes offering financial assistance to other less-fortunate nations, but also working to implement educational systems that would allow the citizens of those nations to improve their economies from within.

The ability to obtain an advanced education also allows United States citizens to stay abreast of technological advancements in both food and medicine that improve their quality of life and could help those living in poverty around the world as well. According to the American Marketing Association, almost 840 million people in the world lack adequate food security and go hungry. Similarly, 800 million people are unable to receive health services (Hill and Adrangi 135). The United States, however, avoids such harsh conditions through its use of technology. For instance, the United States has a long history of developing genetically modified crops. While people are still learning how modifying these crops affect their nutritional value, the science that allowed us to produce large amounts of food with few resources and in short amount of time will continue to develop and could also help us feed other countries and teach them how to farm in less-than-ideal conditions. Likewise, the medical technologies developed and used in America provide its citizens not just available medical treatment, but the most medical treatments in the world. Thus, much like it can help the rest of the world stay fed, America could use its medical advancements to improve the health and lives of those in other countries.

Note how—despite the necessity of only having one topic, idea, point, or subject per paragraph—that topic can be a single or multifaceted one. Again, in the above examples, the author’s first paragraph focuses on a single subject: education. Whereas her second paragraph covers technological advancements in both agriculture and medicine. **To decide whether a paragraph should “zoom in” on a single point or “zoom out” to cover multiple points, one must decide how important or potentially damaging that point can be to one’s argument.** If the topic is important, the author should focus an entire paragraph on it. If the topic is relatively unimportant or somehow damaging but necessary for one’s argument, that topic should be included in a paragraph with other relevant topics so one’s readers pass over that information quickly or pay less attention to it than they would if it were the focus of its own paragraph. This zoom-out method can also be useful for including a large swathe of necessary background information before zooming in on the more pertinent information for your paper or argument.

Below are two example paragraphs on Rocky IV that illustrate the difference between a large, multifaceted or “zoomed out” paragraph and a focused or “zoomed in” one:

Multiple/Zoom Out:

- Rocky utilized several training methods while preparing to fight Ivan Drago.
- For instance, Rocky ran through the snow, chopped wood, climbed a mountain, and lifted a horse carriage.
- Rocky’s previous success as a boxer granted him access to the most sophisticated training methods, but that success also distanced him from the hunger and passion that helped him find success in the first place.
- To beat Drago, then, Rocky knew he needed to return to both a stripped-down training program and version of himself.

Single/Zoom In:

- Ivan Drago’s training regimen, however, focused primarily on the use of anabolic steroids.
- Even though Drago used high-tech machinery whose functions match the exercises used by Rocky, we also very clearly see Drago receive a shot of steroids in his thigh.
- The training montage makes clear that while Rocky digs deep within himself to find the strength needed to win, Drago turns to artificial and illegal supplements to succeed.
- Thus, with the type of irony that makes Hollywood films successful, Rocky’s rejection of the opportunities provided by success actually allows him to succeed, whereas Drago’s success-at-any-means approach ultimately leads to his downfall.

I find that in the shift from outlining to drafting, **the decision between which pieces of evidence will receive their own (zoomed in”) paragraph and which will be grouped into a larger, multifaceted (or “zoomed out”) paragraph is one of the most difficult but essential decisions a writer must make.** One of the hardest things writers need to do is pull their ideas apart for their readers. The mind is powerful and can associate many disparate pieces of information, but the readers are not in the writer’s mind, so the writer must pull those ideas apart for the readers so they can see how those ideas fit together and in what order. Also, the more you pull those ideas apart into their constituent parts, the more likely you are to dig deep enough into your topic that you will locate some fertile ground that will, in turn, allow you to write a paper that will interest even the expert and, thus, make a valuable scholarly contribution to your field or discipline.

A paragraph can also include multiple pieces of evidence—even from different sources. Sometimes, a single perfect piece of evidence will suffice, but, on other occasions, you may want to use multiple pieces of evidence that point to the same conclusion as a way of reinforcing or furthering your point. Such a choice, is perfectly acceptable, just make sure that if you include multiple pieces of evidence, your topic sentence (P) and Conclusive Statement (S) account for each piece of that evidence. You can also decide whether to offer individual analysis for each piece of evidence or one section of analysis that accounts for all of them. Thus, your paragraph may take the form of either P, E, A, E, A, S or P, E, E, A, S.

If, after you have written it, you want to **check your paragraph to make sure it is focused**, start by getting some distance from it. One of the hardest things writers must do is read what they wrote and not what they meant to write. Remember, “revision” literally means to see with new eyes.

Then, ask yourself, **what is the ONE THING I want my readers to take from this paragraph?** To what do I want them to notice or pay attention?

Once you’ve identified that ONE THING, continue by following these steps:

- Read your first sentence to see if it introduces the topic you identified as most important. If so, good; if not, rewrite.
- Read your last sentence to see if it explains how specific elements of that topic are relevant to your thesis. If so, good; if not, rewrite.
- Read every other sentence to see if it relates back to your first sentence’s topic. If so, good; if not, decide whether that sentence deserves its own paragraph, belongs in a different paragraph, or should be cut because it is irrelevant.

- If the paragraph is in your Rule Explanation, read every sentence again and make sure it is directly relevant to your Application.

TRANSITIONS:

If you have done a good job outlining your paper,⁴ you should have already thought through the arrangement and order of your paragraphs, but, if you are stuck and having a hard time moving from one paragraph to another, you can simply use a **repetition of key terms**.

Thus, if one paragraph is about motive and the following one is about intent, I might simply add a prepositional phrase at the beginning of my topic sentence for the intent paragraph and write:

“Along with motive, a defendant must also prove intent.”

With that simple repetition of key terms, I have bridged the gap between my paragraphs for my readers, illustrated the logic that links those paragraphs, and brought those readers from one topic to another.

NOTE: Having a hard time transitioning between paragraphs might be a sign that you have not fully thought through the logic connecting those paragraphs or you skipped a step in your argument. You may then want to return to your outline and examine the order and arrangement of your topics and evidence.

Counterarguments and Concessions:

Once you’ve completed your Main Argument, you may also want to include a Counterargument or Concession section. **A Counterargument addresses how and why others may disagree with you before then refuting that argument or arguments. A Concession, on the other hand, introduces how and why others may disagree with your argument and admits the validity of those positions but then goes on to argue that, despite the validity of those opposing views, your point is more valid or the better solution.**

Remember to **always use respectful terms** when addressing opposing audiences and their arguments; those audiences are the ones you most want to convert to your side. Treat them with respect and acknowledge the logic and relevance of their opinions. Doing so will reassure those readers that you have considered their position, which, in turn, also enhances your credibility as an author by illustrating that you have been thorough in your research, remained open-minded, and thought through all possible perspectives on the issue.

⁴ See the later section on “Outlining and Prewriting.”

In addition, **if your argument is a controversial one or your audience is one likely opposed to your views, you may want to move your counterargument or concession before either the Background or Main Argument section.** In a situation like that just described, you will need to let your audience know you have considered its assembled beliefs and stances before its members will be willing listen to your argument. If you are arguing to oppositional or skeptical audience, they will likely not be able to engage fully with your argument until you have addressed their problems with it. In most academic scenarios, though, authors can assume their audience is either neutral or supportive and leave this section until right before the conclusion.

To begin a counterargument or concession section, **you must first decide whether a counterargument or a concession is more appropriate.** You may also need to decide if you need both or more than one of each. To decide whether you need a counterargument or concession and what you might include in either, ask yourself the following: Who might disagree with my position and why they would do so? **Normally, people disagree with an argument based on one or more of the following reasons:**

- a. **Values:** Is there a set of values based on race, color, creed, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, age, etc. that might disagree with your stance?
- b. **Self-Preservation:** Can you think of any person or group of people who might feel that your argument may affect their way of life?
- c. **Opinion:** Is there a person or group of people who—for reasons beyond logic or reason—might disagree with you. Members of this group will be hardest to convert. You should still try to reach them, but recognize that you might not be able to sway them to your side.

To make either a Counterargument or Concession you can **follow this pattern: Introduce (the opposing argument), Acknowledge (its validity), Transition (to your counterargument), Conclude (with a statement of why your position is superior).**

A. Terms for Introducing:

- a. One/Some may argue/believe/interpret/view/claim
- b. Opposing views claim
- c. While it may be true

B. Terms for Acknowledging:

- a. Admittedly
- b. Certainly
- c. Of course
- d. One cannot deny that
- e. While I acknowledge

C. Terms for Transitioning (**Make certain to make this Transition deliberate and clear**):

- a. Nevertheless
- b. Yet
- c. However
- d. On the other hand
- e. Those points have some validity, but
- f. In spite of
- g. Despite

D. Terms for concluding:

- a. Thus
- b. Therefore
- c. As a result

Below is an **example counterargument paragraph**:

Some American citizens may believe the United States already provides enough foreign aid from our federal budget to struggling countries around the world. Certainly, the current United States' debt, which exceeds \$18 trillion, is substantial, and we certainly need to address our own concerns. Yet, the budget created to control our own national debt dedicates much smaller amounts to foreign aid than many Americans believe. In her article, "Foreign Aid and National Security," Nellie Bristol explains, "Americans think 25% of the federal budget goes to foreign aid and that a more justified percentage might be closer to 10%. In reality, foreign aid constitutes only 1.1% of our federal budget" (Bristol 532). Misinterpreted facts or a complete lack of important information often leads to a misunderstanding of the United States' role in aiding deprived countries. Such a claim, therefore, that America already provides enough aid to the rest of our world remains both inaccurate and relatively unjustified.

Outlining and Prewriting:

The above guidelines should introduce you to the main structure of an article. **To make the writing of your article easier, though, I suggest creating an organized and detailed outline before you begin writing.**

My process, which you can follow or modify, begins with researching my topic and placing Post-It notes on the side of the page next to the quote or fact I think will be useful to my argument, and I make sure to write a small notation on that Post-It as to why I think that quote or fact is important.⁵ When I finish that article or book or have too many Post-Its, I then go back to the first one and ask myself if, after having read the entire article or book, I still find that particular information useful. If so, **I open a Word document and type the entire quote.**⁶ I then, in parentheses, add the title of the book or shortened version of that title ("VT"

⁵ You could certainly also write in the margins, but I often work with library books and have run out of room or changed my mind when writing in the margins of my own books. Many students like to use highlighters, which is also fine, but make sure you also write on a note on a Post-It or in the margin to remind you why what you highlighted was important. Otherwise, when you return to your highlighted sections you will, at best, need to reread everything or, at worst, have forgotten why you highlighted them in the first place.

⁶ I know this portion of my process is slow and time-consuming, but I find it extremely beneficial for a few reasons. First, plenty of studies consider the difference between handwriting and typing notes. My process of beginning with handwriting and then transferring to typed notes means I gain the benefits of both methods. I lock in the initial impulse of connection and importance in my handwritten notes, and then I re-familiarize myself with the quotes and their importance as I type them up. Second, once I have my notes typed, I can then cut, paste, and manipulate them at ease. Third, as many of those quotes will likely end up in my text, my note collecting actually allows me to begin typing the text of my piece. Fourth, and maybe most useful, once all my notes are typed, I then have a searchable document of those notes and my research. Very often, while working on a written piece, I remember a useful quote

for *Verse Tradition*, for example) and the page number or numbers of the quote. If, in the source material, the quote appears across more than one page, I add a double backslash (//) in the text of the quote where it moves from one page to the next. That way, if I end up only using a portion of that quote in my text, I will know on which pages or page that section originally appeared. Next, I type in bold font why that information is useful, what topic or point it addresses, or how I think I might use it. A finished entry may look like this:

The two men, one twenty-three years old and the other almost forty, were soon lunching together. Pound would call Binyon “BinBin,” “one of the best loved men in London.” In “him & in his work” he // savored “a sort of pervading slow charm.” (VT 10-11) **Pound on Binyon and Slowness**

If I am feeling particularly productive, I will, after typing that quote and my personalized short-cite, go ahead and scroll to the bottom of the page and type up the full citation so I have all the information I need for that quote and do not need to consult the source again for that information. Moreover, I have now begun assembling my Works Cited list, which will save me time in the long-run—especially if I no longer have access to those sources—and will prevent the busy work after finishing my article that keeps me from feeling the satisfaction of completing my piece.

Once I have typed all the source notes that I still find potentially useful or pertinent, I arrange them all into sections according to their potential uses or pertinence as listed in my bold comments that follow those quotes—or, in other words, I group together all the points that work as evidence for the same topic. **I then label that section according to the topic.** I usually use all caps, bold, and underline for each of those topic sections. I then arrange those sections according to the order with which I will discuss them in my paper. That arrangement can be based on paper sections (Intro, Background, Main Argument (subdivided by topic), Counterargument/Concession, Conclusion) or importance (what is most important for my argument); though you will probably find that arranging those sections by importance will essentially group them in the same order as the sections of your paper.⁷

While **importance** may be the most frequently used of the methods for arranging information, I would include two others along with it: **chronology** and **process**. When arranging information, one can choose to do so according to the sections of the paper one is writing, or one can organize based on some combination of importance, chronology, and process. As discussed above, arranging according to importance means placing one’s most important topics first so the reader is certain to encounter them. Readers do pay attention to endings as well as beginnings, though, and, as such, I may reserve an important piece of information for near the end of a section, paragraph, sentence, or even the entire paper to make sure I leave my reader with a

or statistic as I am writing but have no idea where I initially saw or read it, which requires I stop writing and spend too much time searching for that quote or statistic—that I often editing out later anyway. Once all my notes and research are typed, every piece of it is simply a keyword and a CTRL + F away from potential inclusion in my piece.

⁷ Arranging information according the sections of a traditional scholarly essay will often yield that same order as arranging that information according to its importance to your argument. The arrangement of a traditional essay is built upon the notion of prioritizing your reader’s time and experience and the recognition that, because readers’ have fickle attention spans, writers must make sure their readers encounter the most essential pieces of the information even if they do not finish the piece.

strong point. In following that methodology, however, writers must make sure that bit of delayed information is not so essential that their argument or discussion will suffer tremendously should their readers never encounter it for whatever reason. Thus, one must make a distinction between “emphasis” and “essential” because, while one wants to include a payoff at the end for the committed reader, one also does not want to risk the non-committed reader missing essential information. Thus, I try to save a strong point for the end of the paper and each section, but one that merely emphasizes and early point rather than introduces a new information. As another means of arrangement, **chronology** allows a writer to organize information or events based on the order in which they occurred, which can be useful—especially for Facts sections. **Process**, as a third organizational method, is essentially chronology outside of time or steps in a “process.” Writers use this method when readers must know or be aware of one piece of information before they can understand another. Rarely will a writer use only one of these approaches. Rather, one will likely need to balance these different approaches against each other in a single piece. Yet, while each has its place, I counsel writers to prioritize importance as much as possible, and even when they use one of the other methods of arrangement, I recommend they try to bend that arrangement as far toward importance as possible without destroying the shape of the necessary chronology or process. For instance, if you are working within a chronological pattern, and you have a paragraph about a police officer asking a witness a series of questions, you could likely choose the order with which you list those questions based on their importance to your argument and do so without noticeably upsetting the chronology.

Having now arranged all my evidence into larger topic sections, **I begin to arrange the individual pieces of evidence within those sections according to their importance to my topic or the order with which I will discuss them** (which, again, will usually be the same order). To accomplish that task, I look to see if any of the quotes or evidence I collected for that section repeat each other by covering the same information or making the same point. If I do find repetition, I first consider whether I want to use multiple sources that make same point as a means to reinforce that point or insist upon its validity. If I decide one piece of evidence is sufficient for that point, I choose the one that best expresses that point, and I move it into a second Word document that will function as the outline for THIS paper. This second or “working” outline will include all the evidence I will use for this paper and arranges it in the order I will discuss it. I make this second outline because I do not want to delete anything from my original or “evidence” outline, which I usually label as “Notes” in case I ever return to that topic for another project or find later that the quote I deleted would actually work better in this piece.

Note that this working outline now includes “topic” sections that are subdivided according to the evidence I will use for the individual points I want to make about each of those larger topics. Often, writers make the mistake of only including section titles or larger topics in their outline without also listing and arranging the actual points they want to make about those topics or the evidence they will use to make those points. **An outline that does not actually cover the subject of each paragraph or include the evidence for each point the author wants to make is virtually useless;** it is something like a map that lists cities but not road names or the roads themselves, for that matter. **This delineation of each paragraph and its content may be the most important bit of information in this guide.**

While my outlining model prioritizes evidence from source material because most legal and scholarly arguments are built from pre-established facts or the opinions of those with more authority than you, **if a point that you want to make in your argument comes to you or you think of a topic sentence or a great line for your introduction, write it down and add it to the outline in its proper place.** Outlining is about assembling the argument before writing and, thus, **any piece of that argument is useful and should be included in the outline.** Those seemingly random thoughts and conclusions often end up being the topic sentences that introduce my evidence or the conclusive statements that explain how that evidence supports the argument that is my topic.

Now that I have arranged all the pieces of information or evidence that I will use for this paper into sections and then arranged those sections and the information within them according to the order with which I will discuss them, **I have essentially outlined, in order, all the E's for my PEAS paragraphs.** Thus, all I have left to do is introduce those E's with P's, tell my reader what I want them to notice about those E's with A sentences, and then state why those E's are important to my paper with S statements.

This process is work intensive and includes a lot of pre-writing, but it makes certain my argument is cohesive and logical, and that it progresses linearly without unintentional repetition. More than anything, though, it avoids me staring at a blank screen and wondering what to write next. This process is like painting by numbers rather than staring at a blank canvas. While I know that writing a paper is a daunting task, I do not believe in writer's block per se. Rather, I believe in unprepared writing. If you have gone through all this prewriting and outlining, your writing process should be much more like checking items off your grocery list than wandering around the grocery store while trying to remember what you need to buy.

I hope you found this guide helpful, and I wish you all the best in your writing!