Organising Papers.pdf

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The key to writing a quality paper is organisation. This document addresses three components of organisation:

1. Introduction, Body, Conclusion
2. Central Thread
3. Paragraph Construction

Introduction, Body, Conclusion

One of your goals of writing a quality paper should be to clearly convey your message to your reader. Your reader will receive your intended message if you – i) tell the reader what you are going to say, ii) say it, and then iii) tell the reader what you said. In other words, frame your paper with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

i. Introduction

A solid introduction serves three purposes -

1. It invites the reader into your paper.
2. It captures the reader’s interest and compels her to continue into the body of your paper.
3. It orients the reader and lets her know what to expect.

To use three metaphors, your introduction is like a doorway, a
hook, and a step-ladder. If you do not have a doorway, you cannot enter the house. The reader is secure in knowing that the introduction is the passageway into your paper. The introduction is strategically placed at the top of the paper, so that the reader is cued to begin here. Within the introduction, the reader learns whether you, as author, will be using first or third person. Through your introduction, the reader is able to gauge the reading level; will she be able to understand the vocabulary. The introduction confirms that the selected paper addresses the topics that the reader is anticipating through reading the title. For example, I have selected papers titled something like – *Blind perspective on psychology* – expecting to read about visual impairment. Through the introduction, I have learned that the paper is actually about how perspective on psychological articles is impacted by whether or not the readers are provided the author’s name, or whether the author’s name is removed (what is known in academe as a blind review). As author, you want to ensure that your reader has access to the anticipated content through your introduction.

The second function of an introduction is to capture the reader’s interest and compel her to continue beyond the introduction into the body of your paper. Authors often spend a great deal of time editing their first sentence. Have you ever heard the significance of first impressions, or wisdom about a smile and a solid handshake making or breaking an employment interview? Well, just as first impressions matter in your face-to-face social interactions, so too do they matter within your papers. Your goal should be to WOW the reader in your introduction. Make it easy for the reader to know why she should spend her valuable time reading your paper instead of another. Capture her interest, and give her cues as to how your paper will sustain it. The introduction to your paper should make the body of your paper irresistible. After reading the introduction, she cannot put your paper down. The best way of achieving this effect is to reflect clearly on what interests you the writer. Your energy and enthusiasm for your angle on the topic will be evident in your text, and will infect your reader with the same bug.

The metaphor presented above for this second goal of your introduction is a hook. Fishermen place shiny objects on the end of their fishing lines to attract, or lure, the fish. You must use your introduction for the same function. Using your shiny introduction to hook the reader, reel them in through your paper’s body. This morning I had the opportunity to speak with a person from Public Relations about one of my current research initiatives. Even though we did not explicitly discuss our intent,
she and I collaborated in finding a hook so that she could write the article into a press release. In search of a hook, she asked me questions like, *Why did you choose this particular school? Do you know of this approach ever having been taken before? What was important to you about doing it in this particular way?* In framing my responses, I tried to envision what might matter about this project to the reader. Likewise, when you are writing the introduction to your paper, you will want to consider what might intrigue your reader. Will you insert questions that you will then answer in your paper? Will you describe a contemporary issue that has been capturing the attention of the public in the popular press? Will you create a colourful metaphor to paint a picture for your reader? How will you show your reader that your paper is interesting, readable, and perhaps even a new and distinctive contribution to the literature?

The third function of your introduction is as an orientation for the reader. The metaphor provided above was that of step-ladder. Your reader needs to know what to expect, so that she can climb incrementally from your introduction on into the body of your paper. Planned redundancy in papers is a positive feature. This is the part of the paper in which you tell your reader what you are going to say. Readers appreciate the security of hearing your message three times. Once, briefly, in your introduction. Once again, comprehensively with plenty of examples and application in the body of your paper. One last time, briefly and summarily in your conclusion. Telling the reader what you are going to say, saying it, and then saying what you said assures the reader that she has captured and understood your message. This is not to say that you are to use the same words three times in your paper. Use synonyms and metaphorical language to convey an equivalent message.

For example, here is an extract from the introduction to the following paper -


*When we proposed our action research project to our university ethics committee, the local school authority and the school principal, we framed our question as what is the impact of educational technologies on learning outcomes. As is appropriate in qualitative inquiry, this initial question shifted out of the research spotlight and new questions began to emerge. The compelling aspects of the research for us as academic*
researchers, for the children at the school, and for the school personnel became child agency and children as researchers.

The body of the paper proceeds to review applicable research about the relationship between teaching and learning and educational technology, and to describe the research project in detail. The conclusion returned to the same concept, restating it using different words.

As we asked ourselves what matters, and why do we teach what we teach – authentically walking the talk of an inquiry-based stance – we discovered that the technology was working as a catalyst and tool and that the real research lay in the children’s wonder and production of a meaningful process and generative outcomes. We believe that an inquiry-based stance is the meaningful objective of any teaching and learning experience, regardless of whether or not educational technology is used as catalyst.

The reader had the opportunity to hear about our shifting research question three times. First, we prepared our readers for this topic in our introduction. Second, we elaborated and explained in the body of our paper. Third, we left our reader with a lasting memory of our topic through our conclusion. We told the reader what we were going to say, said it, and then told the reader what we said. Through this organizational framework, we could rest assured that we had clearly conveyed our message to our readers.

\[ ii. \quad \text{The Body} \]

Have you ever contemplated the implications of metaphorically calling the main part of your paper – the \textit{body}? Think about your own body. It has form and substance. While you are composed of distinctive parts with a variety of functions, each of these parts works together to work as a whole. You have bodily systems such as the respiratory and circulatory that function throughout the body to give you life. A body is a complex system. When we pause to reflect on the miraculous nature of the human body it is awe inspiring. However, we seldom give our bodies much thought unless they let us down through sickness or injury, because they work so efficiently and naturally.

A writer should seek an equivalent elegance within the body of a paper. A paper has form and substance. It is about something. While there are metaphorical arms and legs extending out from
the core, it is this core strength that keeps the body upright. All of the systems of the paper work together to convey one’s message.

When I was a child, I used to play with a book divided into three parts. There were heads on the top, body trunks in the middle, and legs on the bottom. The images were of males, females, adults, and children, and other animals like lions and giraffes. By flipping the various sections, I could create a character with an elephant’s head, a little girl’s frame wearing a ballerina tutu and goat’s legs. Sometimes I am reminded of this book when I read some of the submitted papers. There seems to be an odd assortment of images all thrown together with no semblance of plan, structure, or order.

In your introduction, you provided a brief outline. In other words, you said what you were going to say. Now you want to ensure that you are actually saying it within the body of your paper. You might want to begin by elaborating on this introduction. Remember when you were in primary school, and your teacher drew interconnected bubbles to help you storyboard? For example, your teacher might ask you what information you should include about animals. You listed headings such as habitat, food, and predators. In your introduction, you wrote, this paper will describe the koala and its habitat, food, and predators. In preparation for your paper, you added more details to the storyboard (also called a concept map). Under description, for example, you would write details such as marsupial, grey or brown, furry, and jelly-bean size joey. Under the heading of habitat you wrote words such as Queensland, New South Wales, Australia, eucalyptus trees, and encroachment. After completing your concept map, you wrote the body of your paper. In full-sentences, you described the koala, and wrote about its habitat, food, and predators. You included each of these elements in the same order as presented in your introduction. This makes your paper reader-friendly.

Whether as academic or student, papers can be written following much the same process. There are now wonderful digital tools to facilitate the concept mapping process. One of the leading software packages is called Inspiration. There is a sister child-friendly software called Kidspiration.

http://www.inspiration.com/

Remember when you are writing your paper to:
a. Create an outline (at least internally if not on paper);
b. Ensure that all of your headings and details are related;
c. Check that you have included the topics in the same order as presented in your introduction.

Here is a constructive proof-reading strategy.

a. Put your outline aside.
b. Read the entire completed draft of your article.
c. Now read your paper again with some paper and a pen.
   Write an outline working from the article.
   Write key words that emerge from your article.
   Indent terms beneath the key words, when they are sub-topics.
d. Now read this outline on its own without your article.
e. Does it make sense?
f. Does it flow? Is the organization evident?
g. Are all of the terms on-topic?
h. Compare the outline to your introduction.
i. Are all of the same topics addressed in the same order?

iii. The Conclusion

Now that you have written and proofread your introduction and body of your paper, it is time to write your conclusion. Let us return again to our initial organizational framework. Your task is to say what you are going to say, say it, and then say what you said. Thus, the role of the conclusion is to say what you said. Many submitted papers do not conclude; instead they stop. It is almost as if the author used up all of his energy running towards the cliff, so that when he arrived, he did not have the energy to stop, and fell off. Do not send your reader over the cliff looking for the end, nor leave her hanging at the edge of the cliff. Pull your paper or article together for the reader.

A commendable conclusion has the following features:

* It pulls together the key concepts from the paper.
* It is consistent with the paper and does not introduce anything new.
* It leaves the reader with a final, lasting impression.
* It answers the question what matters or in other words so what.
* It leaves the reader with an action directive or calls for further research.

Here is an extract from the conclusion of the article introduced above.


This project exemplifies principles that catalyse transformative teaching and learning. The pedagogical principles demonstrated through this initiative apply to every educative context from grade-school through higher education. An inquiry-based stance to teaching and learning means that:

* Learners are encouraged to wonder and to pursue their own interests;
* Learners generate rather than digest and regurgitate knowledge;
* Knowledge is constructed through community collaboration and participation;
* Learners construct their own understandings, scaffolded upon their contextual life experiences;
* Learning is grounded upon a research process. Learners frame questions, collect data, reflect, interpret, and produce authentic outcomes;
* The role of teachers is not sage-on-the-stage, but guide-on-the-side. Educators encourage, facilitate, and celebrate, and;
* Educational technologies are efficacious tools to support promising teaching and learning practices. Unless pedagogy remains the focus, the technologies can impede rather than accelerate learning.

In conclusion, we ask ourselves and readers, what matters about this action research initiative at a single small rural school in Queensland, Australia? At the risk of being banal, the question is, so what? We argue that this research matters for two main reasons. First, our naturalistic ontological stance enabled us to be open to the emergence of authentic research questions different from our initial plan. While we started out with a view to infusing technology and seeing what would happen, our gaze was redirected by the children – and by our clarifying research lenses – to child agency and children as researchers. As we asked ourselves what matters, and why do we teach what we teach – authentically walking the talk of an inquiry-based stance – we discovered that the technology was working as a catalyst and
tool and that the real research lay in the children’s wonder and production of a meaningful process and generative outcomes. We believe that an inquiry-based stance is the meaningful objective of any teaching and learning experience, regardless of whether or not educational technology is used as catalyst.

The second reason why this research matters is because it is grounded, sensory and experiential. This article presents the phenomenology of a single school. The experience of these children, teachers and principal in the small, Queensland school, might or might not represent the reality of other children, teachers, and principals in other contexts. Yet, the depth rather than the breadth of the inquiry matters. The process enacts an academic commitment to being with children and teachers. Rather than deconstructing and critiquing practices in educational technology integration, we are modelling the day-to-day experience of struggling alongside educators who are innovating promising teaching and learning with children. Our final call is made to academics to authentically collaborate with teachers and children for developing pedagogy that works to engage and enthuse learners.

Apply the features of a commendable conclusion to this passage as a checklist to evaluate the quality. If this is an effective conclusion, then it should remind you as reader what has been said and is important throughout the body of the paper. The conclusion should also leave a lasting impression, so that you are left with the echo of this text when applying what you have read.

In conclusion to this section on Introductions, Bodies, and Conclusions as organizational strategies, the key to writing a highly distinctive paper is to say what you are going to say, say it, and then say what you said. Readers will appreciate this compass as they try to navigate their way through your paper. This approach to organization gives you the metaphoric three kicks at the cat. By the time the reader has read your key points in your introduction, body, and conclusion (all in unique and distinctive words), you are almost guaranteed to have gotten your point across. This segues to the next section of this document which addresses – what is the point. If you are going to write what you intend to write, write it, and then write about what you’ve written, then you had better know what it is that you are writing about. This next section, addressing this important component of writing a quality paper, is entitled Central Thread.

Central Thread
Imagine that you are beading. You will select bead size, shape, colour and pattern. Then, one by one, you will string each bead onto the wire or thread. Perhaps you have selected seed beads for the two ends and a pattern of larger beads for the centre. Have you ever dropped the thread midway through beading? What happens? Yes, the beads drop to the floor, scatter, and some are lost.

This image is figuratively what happens when you fail to create or drop the central thread of your paper. Your insightful ideas and well-constructed arguments scatter like fallen beads and are lost. No model is going to adorn her neck with such a necklace and no editor is going to publish such an article. In order for each bead to be appreciated and maintain its rightful place in the necklace, your design requires the structure of the internal thread.

When writing a paper, explicitly articulate your central thesis. Then, structure the elements of your paper around this thesis. Ensure that all of your points are related to your central thesis. Provide navigational cues for your readers so that they can follow your logic, and clearly understand how each facet of your paper relates to this central core.

Here is an example. This is an extract from –


*The focus of this article is on the ethical reflections and auto-ethnographic processes that we engaged in within the early stages of the child-as-researcher project. Within the first two sessions at the school, the focus of the action research initiative changed from the learning outcomes of infused educational technologies, to authentic collaboration and engagement with children, their teachers, and knowledge. Shim (2008) distinguished between the linear cause-and-effect of the former focus, and the emancipatory epistemology of the second focus.*

*Narrative teaching, in which teachers transmit knowledge and students receive it, mirrors the oppressive conditions in the society. To eliminate narrative teaching, teachers and students must share educational contents, critically investigate the problem together, relate it to their lives, constantly challenge each other by sharing new ideas, and reform their old ideas. Teachers should guide their students to realize how the knowledge that they stumbled upon inside the classroom are related to historical, social, political, and cultural realities. (p. 530)*

*While educational technology can be used to “critically investigate,” we realized that the research was not about this technology, but about the*
children and teacher’s journey of new relationships with one another and with knowledge. As we spent time being with the children throughout the school day, the meaning and significance of the educational technologies were reconstructed as tools to advance child agency and celebration with children as respected knowledge constructors. One of the teachers described a pedagogical epoch; she explored the angst of self-discovery as secure in control of her class and their learning, intersecting with a troubling realization that letting go would allow the children to grow. A passion for teaching and learning was reignited in the principal, who marveled at the impact of the performance and focused participation of a child ascertained as hyperactive.

Including the words – the focus of this article is on – provides a clear navigational clue to the reader. These words alert the reader as to the composition of the internal material on which the metaphorical beads are strung. In this next extract from the same article, you will read an example of the authors reinforcing this connection to the central thread. The authors remind the readers of the central thread and how the statements throughout the article relate.

Within the first two weeks of the project, we (Dr. Kinash & Dr. Noble) stepped back and reflected on: 1) the nature of our research, 2) our proposed project, 3) our role and identity as academics in teacher education, and 4) our relationship with children, parents and with teachers. The essence of all four is a deep desire to support children’s learning. This is plain, but not simple. It became clear that in order to proceed we needed another partner and accompanying processes. Madison Hoffman, a twelve-year-old child became an authentic, contributing partner to the design and writing of the research plan and the construction of this reflexive article. Together, we constructed and acted upon six child agency processes. 1) We constructed an open-ended, responsive, plain-language version of the proposal. 2) We became explicit and articulate about roles and engaged in meta-process reflections with the children. 3) We invited the community in to share our journey. 4) We supported the children in moving beyond picking a topic to framing their own questions. 5) We supported the children in project management processes. 6) We acknowledged the children as generators of real knowledge, deserving of an authentic audience. This article explicitly details why and how we initiated authentic children’s research.

Compare the two passages. Note that both call attention to the central thread of the article. Both address the reflections and processes in the early stages of a research project. Just like the first passage, this second passage provides flag-words that mark the articulation of the central thread for the reader. In the first passage, these words were – the focus of this article is on – and in this second passage, the flag-words are – this article explicitly details. This second passage also includes a list. Lists are
very useful organizational strategies within papers. The first part of this passage makes the central thread salient for the reader. The final sentence of this passage explicitly describes the central thread. Sandwiched in-between are six key points. This type of intentional presentation leaves no doubt for the reader as to the relevance of these points. In other words, when the reader delves into a passage about project management, he is able to understand the relevance. The content on project management has a relevant place in the article. It is not a sole bead rolling across the floor. Following from reading this passage, the reader now expects content on the proposal, roles and meta-process reflections, community collaboration and so forth. It is important that each of these components are elaborated and addressed in the same order as presented in this outline. The list provides navigational cues for the reader that she may then use to guide her journey through the content.

The first portion of this document addressed the overall framework of your paper or article. Specifically, this document encourages saying what you are going to say, saying it, and then saying what you said. These are the basic definitions of the introduction, body, and conclusion. The next passage asserted that you need to know what you are writing about in order to write the parts of the paper. The metaphor of the central thread has been used to describe the focus or thesis of your paper. Not only is it important that you, the writer, are clear about your focus, but it is also important that you are explicit about this focus for your reader. All of the metaphoric beads need to have an obvious place and pattern on the central thread holding them together. The final section of this document on Organization addresses a micro-component. Just as the introduction, body, conclusion, and central thread are essential for the overall organization of your paper, the main structure is dependent upon the micro-structure of the paragraph.

**Paragraph Construction**

In the above sections of the document, you were urged to define your focus or central thread of your paper, and then to ensure that each of the elements of your paper are intentionally included and obviously relevant to this thesis, like beads on a beautiful necklace. Further, you were encouraged to present this focus in your introduction, elaborate within your body, and summarize in your conclusion. Did you know that just as the larger scheme of your paper should be structured in this manner, so too should each of the micro-components of your paper, or in other words, your paragraphs.

Here are some of the important characteristics of paragraphs -
Each paragraph has an identifiable central focus.

The first sentence is introductory.

The middle sentences form the body, or in other words, elaboration.

The final sentence is concluding.

There are transitions within paragraphs (in the introduction, conclusion or both) to allow the reader to navigate between paragraphs.

In order to accomplish all of this, a paragraph cannot consist of a single or even two sentences.

Here is an extract from an article in order to illustrate these components of paragraphs.


When probed, instances in which the teachers insisted that they required face-to-face supports were not about elements of the interchange that could only be offered when in the same room with someone else. Thinking about the essential qualities was blocked by the means in which they were commonly experienced. For example, Barb stated that the face-to-face connection with her GENA mentor was necessary. However, she and her mentor meet at a location away from the school. Neither the students, nor the classroom learning artefacts are present with them for the interchange. A possible interpretation of the exchange is that what is important is that the teacher and the GENA mentor have a regularly scheduled day booked for one another. That intentional, non-negotiable dedication to inquiry could also be achieved at a distance through shutting office doors, turning off cell phones, and turning on voice-mail.

So why, when she is able to articulate the benefits of online supports, does Betty resist using the online tool, Intelligence Online (IO). Although she queries possible explanations, Betty herself does not know why. She is very positive about IO. "It’s like a big staffroom online. It’s like a hallway where everyone can meet and be like, ‘what are you doing today for such and such?’ ‘Oh, here’s what I’m doing, or did you try this?’” She goes on to say,
It’s a great place for some people and I struggle with it. I don’t know why either because I check my e-mail at least once a day. ... I’m not sure what it is. So my partner that I’m planning that math unit with and I have committed to being more of a participant on IO. But see, now it’s the end of September and we haven’t been. One of the explanations Betty ponders is time. Olive said, “you can’t take planning time away from teachers and expect good instruction.” Regular planning time would certainly be a helpful factor. Another explanation Betty tries on is the embarrassment of a public forum, should the content of a message not demonstrate articulate thought, correct spelling, and consistency with an inquiry stance. However, Betty and most of the other teachers stated that GENA staff and others associated with GENA are non-threatening and non-judgmental.

Perhaps the answer to Betty’s, and others’, resistance to online communication can be found in Stephens and Hartmann’s (2004) criteria for effective online discussion. First, teachers must have access to the computers and to a network. Although the network provided by Betty’s school board is occasionally down, she has fairly consistent access. The second criterion is a community of learners who need the online discussion forum because they do not have opportunity to have face-to-face discussions. They also must have objectives in common. Betty and her colleague both need the forum to plan their math inquiry. Also, as shared by Frances, you do not need to be hundreds of miles away from one another to need to communicate online. This can be a facilitating forum for those in the same school who simply do not have the opportunity in their day-to-day schedules to have a reflective conversation. The third requirement is a concrete and shared task, which is present for Betty in the form of the desired math inquiry. Fourth is “a sense of responsibility to the group and/or task” (p. 60). Betty herself said that this is an important factor and should prove motivating. Betty is adamant that she maintain in contact and retain active supports from GENA. With the phasing out of her school-based face-to-face supports she recognizes that it is incumbent upon her to be an active member of the IO network if she wants to remind GENA staff of her presence and commitment.

You will note that there are three paragraphs included in this extract. Each paragraph addresses a component of defining elements of interaction, specifically as related on face-to-face versus online contexts. Notice that the first and third paragraphs have both introductory and concluding sentences. The middle paragraph is not stand-alone, only making sense when sandwiched by these other two paragraphs. Yet, it is important that it remain a paragraph of its own accord because it addresses the specific element of using Intelligence Online. Also note the transitions within the paragraphs that provide the transitions between them. For example, the middle paragraph addresses a specific instance of resistance to online communication. Therefore, the next paragraph
introduces relevant theory (the next bead on the necklace) by reading, *perhaps the answer to Betty’s, and others’, resistance to online communication* …” Each bead on the necklace is connected to the others.

In conclusion, rigorous, skilful organization of your paper will ensure that your content is understood and appreciated by your reader. In addition to informing our papers through rich content and insightful ideas, we need to ensure that the format and organization of these papers enables the readers’ focus to remain on this content. Three key organizational approaches have been discussed and exemplified in this document. A central thread must visibly weave its way through each paragraph and the paper as a whole. Further each paragraph, and the overall article, must have an introduction, body, and conclusion. Following these organizational strategies will set you well on your way to writing a commendable paper and/or a publishable article.