

Patterns of Development

Usually we combine more than one writing pattern depending on our purpose for writing. For example, a personal statement for a college application might include elements of narration, persuasion, and cause and effect. A letter to the editor of the local paper may use persuasion, argument, and cause and effect. A technical report for work may focus mostly on process or classification.

The practice of writing assigned papers focused primarily on one writing pattern is intended to help you master strategies that you can apply to real-life writing tasks such as these. The larger patterns of development include the following:

- Narration: What happened? Why does it matter?
- Illustration: How can you demonstrate it?
- Comparison/Contrast: How is it similar to or different from something else?
- Classification: What kind of subdivisions does it contain? What category does it belong to?
- Process analysis: How do you do it? How does it happen?
- Causal analysis: Why does it happen?
- Effects analysis: What are the results?
- Definition: How would you characterize it?

These larger patterns of development determine the general shape of your essay. Sometimes these larger patterns of development are called *rhetorical modes* or *writing modes*.

Within the larger patterns of development, the shorter patterns below create *specific* support for main ideas: Shorter patterns of development are used repeatedly and in combination to support, extend, and clarify your claims.

- Examples: Use a specific case to illustrate a general idea
- Statistics: Use numbers to support an idea
- Comparisons: Show a like or unlike relationship between two things (objects, ideas, persons, situations, etc.) to illustrate an idea
- Anecdotes: Use a short, short story or reminiscence to illustrate an idea
- Description: Use graphic, concrete language to let the reader “see” (show, rather than tell)
- Analogies: Compare one difficult-to-understand thing to an unlike but easily understood thing to illustrate

The patterns of development you choose depend on your purpose and audience. A personal narrative, for example, would rely on description rather than statistics. An argument paper, on the other hand, could use anything from examples and statistics in one paragraph to anecdotes and analogies in another. To decide what patterns of development to use and how much is enough, imagine a reader who is as smart as you are but is skeptical and needs to be convinced. Remember: your purpose is to communicate your thoughts in whatever combination of ways you deem most effective for your message and your audience.

