

Classification-Division Supplementary Information

The following information, although not specifically mentioned by a website reference in Chapter 10 of *Acting on Words*, pertains to the first section of that Chapter.

Sample Thesis Statements Using Classification-Division

Many student essays may be successfully written according to exposition by classification-division. In Chapter 6, we recommend that you conclude your introductory paragraph with your thesis statement, giving both your controlling idea on the topic and your specific reasons for this view. Here are some sample thesis sentences that make various uses of classification-division:

Effective

Alberta presents a remarkable range and diversity of nature, with no less than five distinct ecological worlds existing in the one province.

In this example, the division is spatial—different regions divided by ecology.

Effective

Since contact with European settlers, Saskatchewan's five generations of Indian people have faced distinct challenges according to generation.

The division is temporal—separate generations.

Effective

Rabbi Cohen lived his life according to three principles from which he was never known to deviate: tolerance, compassion, and truth.

The division is according to separate but related values.

Effective

Members of the Busy Class are so insecure about a lack of time that they have divided personal time into five categories.

The division is according to perceived function or application.

Effective

Every food server knows the four classes of obnoxious customer: the commander, the mumblor, the sweet talker, and the raconteur.

The division is according to behavioural attitude through a focus on speaking style.

Solving Three Common Problems in Classification-Division

Here are three common problems to try to avoid:

1. including too many terms
2. treating qualitatively different terms as equal, or identical terms as separate
3. forgetting that classification-division is a tool, not an end in itself

Let us now look at these three in more detail.

1. For a required paper three pages long, double-spaced, the following thesis statement is probably too ambitious:

Needs Improvement

Effective writing style should be coherent, concise, complete, correct, and consistent.

By the time the writer illustrates and explains the first three values, he or she will have written three pages. The last two concepts, less central, may be left for another paper. The problem of reaching beyond the limits of the assignment sometimes explains why too

many classification-division terms are listed in the thesis. As we say in Chapter 9. p. 127, concerning all expository writing, remember to “think suitcase.” Don’t try stuffing in more items than the frame can bear.

Improved

Effective writing style should be coherent, concise, complete, correct, and consistent.

Using too many terms often results from the following problem 2.

2. A common problem of classification-division is listing a number of terms as equals when they do not share a proper common denominator.

Needs Improvement

Every food server knows the four classes of obnoxious customer: the commander, the mumblor, the sweet talker, and the vanisher.

The error in this classification is that only the first three are distinguished by speaking style (the common denominator). Presumably the vanisher—who ducks out before paying the bill—could be any of the previous three. Following is a better way to word the introduction to this essay:

Improved

Every food server knows the three obnoxious customer speaking styles and, of course, knows that worst of all customers, the one with no speaking style when it comes to paying the bill.

Failing to distinguish between accurate categories often underlies problem 1, above, of using too many terms.

Needs Improvement

A good writer is aware of purpose, subject, audience, tone, and consistency.

The first three terms in this statement work together in a basic relationship: knowing his or her underlying purpose, the writer connects accordingly with the subject and audience. Tone comes about as an *effect* of the writer's awareness of purpose, subject, and audience. Consistency, in turn, is a finer requirement of tone, as it should be maintained throughout. The writer of the above thesis statement would do well to remove "tone" and "consistency" from the thesis sentence entirely. These two terms can be worked into other, appropriate sections of the body, as outcomes and tools of the main relationship under discussion. The old saying that "less is more" should guide you in writing essays based on classification-division. In short essays, try not to exceed three terms. Often you can consolidate two or more terms into one simple encompassing term. Try to correct the following thesis sentence:

Needs Improvement

My father succeeded in life by following his heart, working hard, always having time to listen to another's problems, finishing every task he started, spending time with his wife and children, and keeping in shape.

In this case, the writer has equated examples and qualities, as well as failed to assign examples to the quality each illustrates. Having time for others' problems and spending time with the family exemplify following one's heart (exercising compassion). Finishing every task exemplifies perseverance. Keeping in shape exemplifies healthful living. Having reduced all of these terms into three qualities, you can now place them in an effective order. The following rewording, using climactic order, views compassion as most important quality of all and therefore places it last:

Improved

My father succeeded in life by following three central values: hard work, health, and compassion.

The examples are reserved for the body of the essay where they elaborate whichever of the three terms they most relate to.

Along with confusing would-be partners with true equals (such as examples as values, effects as starting points), writers sometimes use two or more apparent divisions to say essentially the same thing.

Here's another example:

Although the old house is charming inside, it is rundown outside, unevenly heated, unsightly, and misfitting among the neighbouring homes.

“Rundown outside” can be combined with “unsightly” and “misfitting among the neighbouring homes.” “Unevenly heated” should be treated first, as part of the inside focus, not placed between two references to the outside. The better, revised thesis statement now reads:

Better

Although the old house is charming inside, it is unevenly heated; outside it is badly rundown.

3. Classification-division is a tool, not an end in itself. As with any pattern of organization, remember that you are using this method in the service of a higher purpose, demonstrating your thesis. Pat Deiter-McArthur, for example, describes the five generations of Indian people in order to orient her own and the reader's further thinking and action (p. 166). That particular essay uses a classification of five generations to illustrate a historical process—the division merely serves a deeper purpose.