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Identifying the sequence of ideas

In this chapter, you will:

1. read articles from academic sources.
2. identify the sequence of ideas in texts.

As you read an academic text, it is important to understand the sequence of ideas in order to follow the writer's argument. Texts are structured in different ways in different subjects, but the majority of reading that undergraduates do falls into three categories:

An argumentative/thesis structure - The purpose of an argumentative text is to persuade the reader to accept a point of view or an opinion.

A problem – solution structure - A problem–solution text also presents an argument and attempts to persuade the reader that the solutions presented are workable and worth implementing.

A report structure - A report does not present an argument, but it may still be biased if all the facts are not presented.

Academic reading passages have a typical general structure with three main sections: introduction, body and conclusion.

| | Describe | Discuss | Defend |
|--------------|---|--|---|
| Introduction | Give background on the topic Say which of the aspects of the topic will be described | Give background Say what the different positions are (and perhaps give your view) | Give background Say what your position is on the topic |
| Body | Describe each aspect in turn with supporting evidence | Give sub-arguments for each position with supporting evidence | Give sub-arguments for your position with supporting evidence |
| Conclusion | Summarise the description | Summarise the different positions (and perhaps reinforce your view) | Reinforce your position |

A. In which section (introduction, body and conclusion) would you be most likely to find:

- | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------|
| 1 | A statement of the writer's position on the topic? | <u>Introduction</u> |
| 2 | A summary of the main arguments in support of the writer's position? | <u>Conclusion</u> |
| 3 | A series of generalisations relevant to the topic? | <u>Introduction</u> |
| 4 | An outline of how the essay is organised? | <u>Introduction</u> |
| 5 | Definitions of the key terms used in the essay? | <u>Introduction</u> |
| 6 | Evidence to support each generalisation? | <u>Body</u> |
| 7 | A restatement of the writer's position on the topic? | <u>Conclusion</u> |
| 8 | Background information on the topic? | <u>Introduction</u> |

Read the introduction to an essay with the title Discuss the impact of out-of-town shopping centres on the region in which they occur.

1. Over the last twenty years out-of-town shopping centres have been built on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. 2. Typically, they contain a wide range of shops and entertainment facilities such as cinemas, and car parking is free. 3. There is widespread recognition that these centres have social, economic and environmental impacts on the region in which they occur. 4. However, there is considerable debate about whether their overall impact is positive or negative. 5. In this essay I will argue that while there are advantages for consumers in having access to out-of-town shopping centres, in general they have a negative impact on the surrounding area.

B. Which sentences in the introduction are:

- The background? **2**
- A recognition of different views? **4**
- A statement of the writer's position? **5**

Common knowledge is information that readers in the same field are likely to share. Common knowledge is commonly used in **introduction** paragraphs.

C. The following extracts (a-c) all make the same claim. In which extract does the writer:

- Give an example to support the claim? **b**
- Assume that the claim is common knowledge, so no supporting evidence is needed? **c**
- Support the claim by referring to a published work where the same claim is made? **a**

- a. Out-of-town shopping centres have social, economic and environmental impacts on the region in which they occur (Johnson, 2015).
- b. Out-of-town shopping centres have social, economic and environmental impacts on the region in which they occur. For instance, since the building of the KLCC building, many small shops in the nearby town have been forced to close.
- c. There is widespread recognition that out-of-town shopping centres have social, economic and environmental impacts on the region in which they occur.

Read the following text.

WHY SHOULD WE PRIORITISE?

- 1 Tremendous progress has been made in our lifetimes. People in most countries live longer, healthier lives, air and water quality in the developed world is generally getting better, and a much larger population is being adequately fed.
- 2 But there are still many problems to tackle. The minority of us lucky enough to have been born in the developed world would take for granted universal education, an assured food supply and clean, piped water. Hundreds of millions of people are not so lucky. And although the world's problems fall heavily on the developing world, rich countries also have their own problems, including drugs, conflicts and corruption.
- 3 When it comes to the globe's toughest issues, policy-makers have a huge list of spending possibilities and of course it will not be simple. If an international agency spends \$10 million on one project instead of another, how much more good will it do? Global leaders can rarely answer that question. They need better information and so do ordinary citizens. Economics gives us the tools to look at the costs of taking effective action and measure the expected benefits. When we know the costs and benefits, it will be a lot easier to choose the best projects – the projects which do the most good with the money available.
- 4 National governments prioritize all the time. Government revenues are finite and there are many competing demands for expenditure. There needs to be a balance between defence, education, healthcare and welfare and every segment of the society needs to understand this. **There is widespread recognition that governments do not have infinite resources and that they must satisfy important social needs while staying sustainable.**
- 5 But when we come to global welfare projects, the situation gets murky. **We seem to believe that we can achieve anything, that the pool of money is infinite, and that everything should be tackled at once.**
- 6 In effect, the majority of the big decisions are made by international agencies that receive money from rich nations and use it for the benefit of the world, especially developing countries. Each such organization has its own remit, scope of work and

funding base. But most operate independently. There is little incentive for cross-agency comparison. As a result, there are few attempts to contrast the work of, say, the United Nations Environment program (UNEP) with that of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and almost no overt efforts at comparing the outcomes achieved by developing charities such as Oxfam and Medicins Sans Frontieres.

- 7 Of course, in principle we ought to deal with all the world's woes. We should win the war against hunger, end conflicts, stop communicable diseases, provide clean drinking water, step up education and halt climate change. But we do not. We live in a world with limited resources and even more limited attention for our biggest problems. This means we have to start asking the crucial questions: if we don't do it all, what should we do first.

D. Skim the text and decide which sentence best summarises the main idea.

- A. National governments are good at prioritising, so they should also decide the order in which global problems are dealt with. 4
- B. We cannot deal with all global problems at the same time, so we have to find ways of deciding the order in which they are dealt with. 7
- C. The world's major problems are all of equal importance, so we should try to deal with them all at the same time. 5

E. Read the text and put the ideas in the sequence that they appear.

| a | We can use economics to compare the costs and benefits of the projects. | 3 |
|---|---|---|
| b | All global welfare projects should be worked on at the same time. | 5 |
| c | Both developed and developing countries still have problems. | 2 |
| d | International agencies are not motivated enough to compare the effectiveness of their work. | 6 |
| e | The quality of life for most people has been improving. | 1 |
| f | People understand that governments have to prioritise national spending. | 4 |
| g | We need to face the problem of how to prioritise problems. | 7 |

- F. One function of the first paragraph of this passage is to describe.
- G. The last paragraph is mainly to defend.
- H. What is the purpose of this passage? defend.
- I. What is the author's intention? To persuade.
- J. What is the author's attitude? Critical.