Arranging information for purpose

There are a many different ways to organize the main body content (information) within any presentation. You should decide which organizational pattern to follow based on whether the pattern helps to do two things:

1) If the pattern helps to achieve your general goal: Do you want inform your audience? Persuade your audience? Entertain your audience? Some organizational patterns work better for informative presentations, while others are more effective for persuasive or entertaining speeches.
2) If the pattern helps you to develop your thesis or key idea.

This reading will provide an overview of eight different organizational patterns typically used in business presentations[1].

Chronological:

A chronological pattern of presenting means that you will arrange your points according to their sequence in time (chronology). This pattern is used to explain a process and is most commonly used when a presentation gives instructions.

Spatial:

A spatial pattern of presenting means that you organize the material you present according to how it is put together or where it is physically located. This pattern could be used to show how the different parts in a model for a product or maybe the physical location of various departments in a new building, for example.

Topical:

A topical pattern uses logical themes to divide up the presentation of your material. For example, if you were giving a sales presentation for photocopiers, using a topical pattern you would arrange your information around maybe the three major types of copiers your customer might be interested in.

This type of pattern is sometimes called a 'catchall approach' because it can sometimes be overused by people who simply put together a list of points and label them as 'topical' though in reality the points are not connected. A real topical pattern should have elements that are logically related in each grouping.

Cause-Effect:

A cause-effect pattern is used to show that certain events have happened or will happen as a result of certain circumstances. For example, this type of pattern could be used to show how a new advertising campaign will help a product to reach a wider audience or even to demonstrate how certain circumstances might be creating a problem.

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[1] The eight organizational patterns are summarized from material in Adler, R., Elmhorst, J. & Lucas, K. (2013). Communicating at Work: Strategies for Success in Business and the Professions. McGraw Hill, p. 264-270)

Problem-Solution:

The problem-solution pattern begins by showing the audience that something is wrong with the current situation and then suggests how to solve this 'problem'. This is one of the simplest ways to give a persuasive presentation. This method of arranging your presentation only really works if you first get your audience to recognize that a problem exists so they are then open to your ideas on how to solve the problem. For example, you could use the problem-solution pattern if your thesis was that 'establishing a system of employee incentives can boost productivity'. First you would need to show that the current level of productivity is low or has been stagnating (the problem) then you would provide information on the incentive system that would encourage employees to work harder and be more productive (the solution).

Keep in mind that this way of arranging your information only really works if your audience does not recognize the problem exists. If the audience already recognizes the problem, it will potentially be boring and redundant for you to spend time presenting the 'problem' to them. If this is the case, it would be better to use one of the following patterns.

Criteria Satisfaction

A criteria satisfaction pattern sets up criteria the audience will accept and then illustrates how your idea or product meets these criteria. For example, a venture capitalist could use a criteria satisfaction organizational pattern when making a presentation looking for investors for a business project. First he/she would introduce a criterion then the investor would show how the new project would satisfy it. One criterion might be that the business plan is solid, so the presenter would give this criterion then show how the new project has a solid business plan. The second criterion could be that there is a talented management team needed, so the presenter would give this criterion before introducing the key members of the new project's management team.

Rather than introducing each criterion and immediately following with how it would be satisfied before moving on to the next criterion, you could also use this pattern successfully by presenting all the criteria together in the beginning of the presentation then providing a proposal that would satisfy them all.

Comparative Advantages:

A comparative advantages plan enables the presenter to put several alternatives side-by-side to show the audience how the presenter's plan is the best. This way of arranging your information is especially useful when the audience is considering an idea that competes with the idea you, the presenter, are advocating. Acknowledging the competing idea and showing why your idea is usually more effective than simply ignoring the competition.

Motivated Sequence:

A motivated sequence plan gives five-steps that are designed to increase the audience's involvement and interest in your proposal. These five steps appear in a motivated sequence plan regardless of the topic of your presentation. The sequence also should remain the same. These steps are:

1. *Attention*. Catch the audience's attention (this is your Introduction)
2. *Need*. Explain the problem clearly and completely to the audience to prove that the problem needs fixing. The purpose of this steps is to make the audience want to hear a solution.

3. *Satisfaction*. In this step you present your solution to the problem set out in Step 2.
4. *Visualization*. Here you clearly describe what will happen if your solution is adopted so the audience has a good mental picture of how your solution will solve the problem. You could also give a visualization of what will happen if your solution is *not* adopted as a contrast.
5. *Action*. In this final step you explain what the audience can do to solve the problem (ideally, adopt your proposal). This step functions as the Conclusion for your presentation.

This way of arranging the information in your presentation works best when the problem you are describing and the solution you propose are relatively easy to visualize. For example, it could easily be used when presenting for a fund-raiser to generate pledges (money) for an emergency appeal.

All eight of these organizational patterns are widely used in business presentations. However, as stated in the beginning of this reading, it is important to select the pattern that helps you to achieve your general goal of informing, persuading or entertaining. The following chart provides a general breakdown of the types of presentation styles and organizational patterns that work best with either style.

Informative	Persuasive
Chronological	Problem-Solution
Spatial	Criteria Satisfaction
Topical	Comparative Advantages
Cause-Effect	Motivated Sequence