The Common Paradigms/Rhetorical Modes

**Narration**  
Narration is an event or series of events written to express a specific meaning or significance. According to Lee Brandon, there are five (5) “properties” involved in narration:

1. **Situation** – the background or setup of the event
2. **Conflict** – the “friction” or the explanation of the problem(s) within the narrative
3. **Struggle** – comes from the conflict; how the conflict is dealt with (not necessarily physically)
4. **Outcome** – the result of the struggle; the resolution
5. **Meaning** – the “moral” of the story; the lesson learned (often, the overall point of the narration)

**Things to remember:**
- **Tense:** Generally, personal narratives are written mostly in the past tense (the event has already passed), though works of literature and summaries are generally written in the present.
- **Point-of-view:** If the narrative is personal, first person (I, me, my, we, our, us) may be used (depending on each instructor’s assignment). Third person (he, she, it, they, them) may also be used if appropriate.
- **Descriptive detail:** Make the narrative come alive with sensory descriptions (using the 5 senses) and vivid language (Brandon 102-104).

**Process Analysis**  
A “process” is a series of actions, functions, steps, or operations that bring about a particular end or result. The chronologically ordered, interlocking steps of a process focus either on how something works or on how something is done. There are two types of process analysis: **informative** and **directive**. **Informative** process analysis explains how something occurs or is done through key information (such as how a wave forms). **Directive** process analysis tells the audience how to do something step-by-step (for example, how to bake a cake, write a paper, make a paper airplane). Often, this form of process analysis is written in the second person (using you or your to refer to the reader). The following outline is generally followed with both informative and directive process analysis (Brandon 191):

- **Introduction** (may include background, necessary tools, or other preparatory information)
  - Step 1 (Phase 1)
  - Step 2 (Phase 2)
  - Step 3 (Phase 3)
  - Step 4 (Phase 4)
  - Steps 5, 6, 7... (Phases 5, 6, 7...)

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**Things to Remember:**

**Language:** Avoid "recipe language" (i.e. dropping articles, subjects of sentences, or prepositions will make your paragraph/essay sound mechanical and choppy).

**Transitions:** Whether they indicate chronology (First, Next, Finally) or spatial organization (Below..., Beside..., Above..., etc.), transitional words or phrases help to clarify order (Brandon 192).

**Descriptive** A descriptive paragraph/essay attempts to recreate an object, person, event, etc. for the reader through the use of specific detail. There are two modes of description – objective and subjective.

**Objective:** A generally unemotional description of the subject. Tends to rely on factual data and visual description.

**Subjective:** Conveys more feeling than the objective description. Often, students will need to use sensory description (sight, taste, sound, touch, smell) and descriptive language (similes, metaphors, personification) to set a mood. One DOMINANT IMPRESSION (overall single point being emphasized) should be the central focus of the descriptive details.

**Things to remember:**

**Language:** BE SPECIFIC. Avoid saying things are “good,” “bad,” “plain,” etc. Words such as this do not draw any clear picture for the reader. Instead, focus on concrete and clear adjectives.

**Order:** Spatial organization is almost always the most logical way to organize a paragraph (top to bottom, side to side, front to back). Chronological order can also be used (Brandon 126-130).

**Cause and Effect** This rhetorical mode allows the writer to closely analyze the “whys?” and “what nows?” of a given event or situation. In general, people encounter causes and effects constantly, so writing about them helps a writer focus on the world around him/her. PLEASE NOTE: not all assignments call for both causes and effects; some assignments only ask for one or the other. A general outline might look like this:

**Introduction** (include central event/situation as well as keywords that indicate causes or effects)

- Cause 1/ Effect 1
- Cause 2/ Effect 2
- Cause 3/ Effect 3...

**Conclusion**

In actual essays, though, the patterns are more complex. They can either proceed deductively from effect to cause, or inductively, from cause to effect. There are many variations, depending on the number of causes or effects to be explained.
**Things to remember:**  
**Order:** Writers may follow emphatic order (weakest to strongest cause/effect), or chronological (time) order.  
**Logic:** Don’t assume that something causes something else to happen simply because one follows the other. Be sure to understand the relationship between events (Brandon 213-216).

**Analysis by Division** For analysis by division, break down the parts of a unit and then analyze each part in relation to the function of the whole (Brandon 168). Analytical essays usually (but not always) examine complex ideas and dissect them into understandable parts. A **physical analysis** breaks an object into its components, and a **conceptual analysis** divides an idea into other ideas. Analysis by division requires a **principle**. The principle is the idea around which a writer breaks up a subject. Each part of the unit **must** relate to the principle.

Example:

1. Unit  
2. Principle of Function  
3. Parts based on the principle  
4. Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Effective as a leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fair, intelligent, stable, competent in the field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider each part in relation to the person’s effectiveness as a manager.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Brandon 168)

The structure of an analysis is this:

- **Introduction/Topic Sentence/Thesis** – establishes the “unit” (subject) and the “principle”
- **Characteristic 1 (or Part I)** – how does this part relate back to the principle?
- **Characteristic 2 (or Part 2)** – how does this relate back to the principle?
- **Characteristic 3, 4, 5 (or Parts 3, 4, 5)** – how do these relate back to the principle?
- **Conclusion**

**Things to remember:**  
**Order:** Spatial or chronological organization will be the pattern most often followed. Don’t jump around.  
**Principle:** Make sure that the principle is clear and stated in the topic sentence/thesis.

**Classification** Classification is “the process of grouping similar ideas of objects, the systematic arrangement of things into classes on the basis of shared characteristics.” Any group of people, objects, or ideas that possesses shared characteristics can be classified. D’Angelo points out that classification differs from analysis by division because **the object of analysis is always singular**—“a painting, a movie, the human body”—while **the subject of classification is always plural**—“cars, jobs, popular songs.” Like analysis by division, classification requires a **principle**.
Example:

Subject: neighbors
Principle: neighborhood involvement
Classes: friendly, meddlesome, private

(Brandon 237)

Introduction (thesis, including the principle and a listing of the types or classes found)
Subclass 1
Subclass 2
Subclass 3
Conclusion

**Things to remember:**

**Principle:** Pick a principle that clearly includes all of the classes within your topic, and make this principle clear in the topic sentence/thesis statement. Make sure that your classes do not overlap!

**Order:** Many students find that emphatic order works best for this rhetorical mode. Build up to your strongest subclass.

**Word Choice:** Avoid terms like good/average/bad or fast/medium/slow. These terms are difficult to define and prove (Brandon 237-238).

**Exemplification** According to Lee Brandon, exemplification is a form of writing “using examples to explain, convince, or amuse” (150). This particular style of writing focuses on the use of “specific, vivid and representative” (150) examples to help the writer prove his/her point. For example, if you are writing about sitcoms that are based on a comedian’s stand-up comedy routine, you should point to specific shows such as Seinfeld or Everybody Loves Raymond in your paragraph or essay. Both of these shows are specific examples of the type of sitcom mentioned above. If you are writing about new wave bands of the 1980’s, you may point to The Cure, Depeche Mode, and Erasure as representatives of this type of band. A general outline for exemplification would be:

Introduction (including thesis or topic sentence that establishes the subject and controlling idea)
Example 1 with explanation of how it refers to the topic sentence
Example 2 with explanation of how it refers to the topic sentence
Example 3 with explanation of how it refers to the topic sentence
Conclusion

You may also use an “extended” example to prove your point. In this case, you would chose one overall example and provide many details to connect the example to the thesis/topic sentence. For example, if you are writing about raising the age for driver’s licenses to 18, you may choose to focus on one specific 16 year old’s dangerous/thoughtless driving habits to support your point.
**Things to remember:**

**Pre-writing:** Take the time during the pre-writing stage to generate more examples then you think you would need. It is easier to have too many and cut down the list, than it is to have too few!

**Order:** You may want to move from your more simple examples to your more complex examples or follow emphatic order.

**Comparison and/or Contrast** Comparison, according to D’Angelo, is “the process of examining two or more things in order to establish their similarities or differences.” Some assignments will specify that “comparison” is for identifying similarities and “contrast” is for indicating differences; however, the term “comparison” maybe used for both differences and similarities. There are two primary patterns of organization when comparing or contrasting – the “subject-by-subject” pattern and the “point-by-point” pattern.

The **subject-by-subject (or block)** pattern deals with the two objects to be compared as wholes and examines first one and then the other:

- **Introduction (includes thesis/Topic Sentence, sets up comparison)**
- **Subject 1**
  - Characteristic 1
  - Characteristic 2
  - Characteristic 3
- **Subject 2**
  - Characteristic 1
  - Characteristic 2
  - Characteristic 3
- **Conclusion**

The **point-by-point**, which is also called “alternating” comparison, treats the subjects alternately in terms of characteristics they share, examining each characteristic in relation to its opposite number:

- **Introduction (includes thesis, sets up comparison)**
- **Characteristic 1**
  - Subject 1
  - Subject 2
- **Characteristic 2**
  - Subject 1
  - Subject 2
- **Characteristic 3**
  - Subject 1
  - Subject 2
- **Conclusion**
**Things to remember:**

*Be aware of the assignment:* Some assignments call for just comparison or just contrast.

*Purpose:* Determine whether you wish to persuade or to inform your reader of something.

**Definition** “To define,” says D’Angelo, “is to set bounds or limits to a thing, to state its essential nature.” An essay-length definition should be extended, and the writer should begin by placing the *subject* in a *class* with *characteristics*. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>is a form of government in which voters elect representatives to manage society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Example taken from Brandon 297)

The arrangement of an extended formal definition may take several forms. In fact, it is often the student’s opportunity to incorporate many of the other rhetorical modes (Description, Cause/Effect, Classification, Comparison/Contrast, etc.). Therefore, the pattern or outline of a definition may resemble one of the patterns listed throughout this handout.

**Things to remember:**

*Language:* Word choice is very important with definition. Don’t complicate the definition by using more difficult language to define the subject. Do not use a circular definition (using the term you are trying to define within the definition).

*Order:* Again, writers often find that emphatic order is best with definition, though spatial or chronological organization may work depending on how the writer chooses to develop his/her term (Brandon 297-301).

**References:**
