College writing courses are designed to help you move beyond a basic list structure in your papers to a logic-based sequence of paragraphs that emerges from your analysis of the assigned readings and is driven by your thesis. Thus, for example, instead of organizing a paper on education by listing three benefits of education and two problems with our current educational system (and writing one paragraph on each benefit and one paragraph on each problem), you will be working closely with ideas and examples from writers such as Gary Colombo, Mike Rose, and Julie Charlip to analyze the particular benefits and problems they encountered through their educational experiences. As you find connections between your writers, and your thesis develops to account for the particular challenges and complications these writers experienced, the organization of your paragraphs will likely develop and change as well.

FOUR ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

1. MAKE A PRELIMINARY ORGANIZATIONAL PLAN:
Introduction: Introduces key terms and ideas; introduce the writers used in the paper; states a preliminary thesis.

Body Paragraph 1: Uses a quoted key term from Author 1 to reflect on a concrete example from Author 2.

Body Paragraph 2: Brings in a related example from Author 3 to compare and contrast to the previous example from Author 2 in relation to that same key term from Author 1.

Body Paragraph 3: Brings in a fresh example from Author 2 and a related quote from Author 3 to show a new aspect to the topic.

Body Paragraph 4: Draws in a further quoted key term or definition from Author 1 to help explain and show the significance of the previous examples and applies the language of that quote to a fresh example from Author 3.

Body Paragraph 5: Compares and contrasts the previous example from Author 3 with a fresh example from Author 2 in relation to that same key term.

Conclusion: Reflects on the implications of the previous discussion and emphasizes what is at stake.

2. MAP A LOGIC-BASED SEQUENCE OF PARAGRAPHS:
Although a preliminary map like the one shown above gives the writer a plan for the paper, it does not yet reflect the logical relationships developed between paragraphs in the paper. That
logic depends on the fresh evidence introduced in each paragraph and the significance of that evidence for the writer’s thesis. For example, in a paper on education, you might find that rather than experiencing the simple rewards of education, each writer’s chances for success in the educational system are deeply affected by their class background, the attitudes and expectations of their families and teachers, and their own level of commitment in owning and taking charge of their own educational progress. The connections you develop between authors in your body paragraphs will in turn help you to hone the organizational logic and develop your thesis. Thus, a writer might start by organizing body paragraphs using the following rough structure:

- Introduction: Introduce and define the “cultural myth” of education from Colombo and develop throughout the paper in every paragraph.
- Body paragraphs 1-3: Compare and contrast Rose and Charlip’s early experiences with education and the particular contradictions they faced. Show how those contradictions challenged some cultural myths about education while supporting others.
- Body paragraphs 4-5: Show the contrasting ways in which Rose and Charlip dealt with those contradictions; how their differing attitudes and levels of commitment affected their educational success and sense of achievement.
- Conclusion: What do Rose and Charlip’s experiences tell us about how cultural myths can work in our society?

Notice how this revised plan does not depend on one simple organizational pattern (chronological, comparison/contrast, problem/solution) but combines elements of all three of those organizational patterns by exploring the problem of educational myths using comparisons and contrasts between the writers, while moving chronologically from their early experiences to their more mature responses.

3. CREATE A POST-DRAFT ORGANIZATIONAL PLAN:
For a revised draft you might create a more detailed organizational map of the paper based on the connections between authors and the thesis you have developed.

Introduction: Define and explain key term (the myth in our society that education promises success); introduce the crucial sources used in the paper (Colombo, Rose, Charlip); and identify the thesis of the paper: “While education promises success, students can realize that promise only if they can come to feel entitled to the kinds of satisfaction and achievement that academic work makes possible. Only then can they feel the commitment necessary to make their education work for them.”

Body Paragraph 1: Use the tracking mix-up example from Rose and the “Hamilton High West” example from Charlip to show how the reality of education contradicts the myth—the bar gets lowered based on class expectations and tracking
Body Paragraph 2: Contrast the “grey matter” quote from Rose with the fine dining example from Charlip to explain the idea of entitlement. Show how the myth of educational success gets complicated by a person’s entitlement or lack of entitlement.

Body Paragraph 3: Use Charlip’s college-bound expectations and Rose’s experience with McFarland to show how teachers can help students develop that sense of entitlement and start to set their own educational goals.

Body Paragraph 4: Contrast Charlip’s difficulty in getting into colleges with Rose’s educational transformation to show that teachers “saving” students is also a myth—a student has to commit to his or her own educational goals and work for them.

Body Paragraph 5: Use Charlip’s pride in her PhD contrasted with Rose’s praise of his teachers to show how the student’s own commitment to achieving educational goals affects their level of satisfaction.

Conclusion: Point out that we can’t just overturn myths about education promising success by saying they are false. It’s the hidden issues involved in a person’s chance of success like entitlement and commitment that end up determining whether a person succeeds and what value they put on their own success.

4. CREATE A TOPIC SENTENCE OUTLINE WITH THESIS

In a final revision, you might hone the topic sentences of each paragraph to signal the logic-based steps you have built from paragraph to paragraph. As a final revision tool, try creating an organizational map with just your thesis statement and the topic sentences (the first sentence of each paragraph) to test how well those topic sentences build from and develop that thesis. This process may help you spot missing links in the logic, beef up your topic sentences to reflect the actual work of paragraphs, note material that should be cut because it doesn’t fit the thesis, and/or see ways to further develop the thesis to account for the great material you’ve added since your early drafts.

Thesis: “While education promises success, students can realize that promise only if they can come to feel entitled to the kinds of satisfaction and achievement that academic work makes possible. Only then can they feel the commitment necessary to make their education work for them.”

Topic Sentence Body Paragraph 1: Because of their class backgrounds, both Rose and Charlip were tracked into schools that set the educational bar low.

Topic Sentence Body Paragraph 2: Although educational experiences such as these taught Rose and Charlip that success would not be easy, the crucial factor for both was the issue of entitlement.
Topic Sentence Body Paragraph 3: Teachers were clearly important in helping both these writers gain a sense of entitlement about their education.

Topic Sentence Body Paragraph 4: However, while Rose attributes much of his success to his teachers, Charlip’s experiences reveal the limits of students depending entirely on teachers for educational success.

Topic Sentence Body Paragraph 5: These differing attitudes regarding whether a student’s own commitment to educational goals can determine his or her level of achievement also seems to affect both writers’ attitudes about their educational success.

Conclusion: As this suggests, we can’t just overturn myths about education promising success by saying they are false.