

## Communication 4312 – More On Organization

“If it was easy, everybody would be doing it.”

Muhammad Ali responding a question by Johnny Carson  
on whether prizefighting was hard work.

Writing is a thinking activity. Putting the ideas down on paper is what we call typing. Writing with a purpose requires organizing your thoughts. Without organization, the story will wander and not be coherent. And it'll look like that – like a bunch of ramblings on the page.

We want to learn how to organize what we write.

What we are looking for in organization is how to get the person in the story to emerge and to be story with as little interference as possible from the writer.

The steps to do that are these:

You've got to have a good beginning. Get into the story quickly.  
The reader needs to know what the story is about from the very first.  
Stay away from anything that may seem like it has been done before.

If it's too easy it may be a cliché. Stay away from *when* and *while*.  
Don't say someone never thought they'd do such and such or that they don't look like whatever it is they are.

The lead can be one, two or three paragraphs. This is in part determined by the length of the story. You can take longer to set up a long story than a short one. (How's that for imparting wisdom!?!)

Now comes the hardest part, I think. You've got to create a bridge between the lead and the rest of the story. You can do that in various ways. You can give background and other identifying characteristics of the person. You can amplify on the lead.

If something doesn't come to you as you are writing, write this sentence:  
Here's where the bridge of the story goes. Then come back later and fill it in.

[Here let me stress that I'm not interested in creating a form that you just stick the paragraphs in. I am interested in giving you some guidance as to how to think about writing a story.]

Your second paragraph will set up the third paragraph, to wit:

Most of the time you will want to have a quote by about the third paragraph. it needs to be a full quote and it needs to be the quote most indicative of what the story is about. Ideally this quote will follow from the lead and amplify the lead.

Back to the second paragraph: that's why I think of it as a bridge. It's got to carry the reader over from the lead to that first full quote.

Now we have the first third of the story. Where do we go now? You've got choices. The simplest way to proceed is to tell the story. Combine and alternate quotes and paraphrases with background and description.

However – and this is a big however: don't tell the story in chronological order. As a writer, you are responsible for inventing your own order in which the story will appear !!!

Put everything in separate paragraphs. Don't muddle them all up.

The second part of the story is going to be the longest part. I should point out that if you are writing a really long story you may have more than three sections. I like the three sections idea for our purposes because I think it is so easy to follow.

Now comes the last part, the third part, the ending. Answer the question here: what haven't I said about this person or what is there that the person has said that I haven't found a way into the story. As I've already said, I don't necessarily like the summing up ending. Just let the story end. Or, if it's appropriate to do so, leave the story hanging.

In whatever you write, you want the organization to be clear and self-evident. You don't want techniques you use to get in the way of that. You ought to be able to look at the story and see the organization. And I should be able to see that, also.

■ David McHam