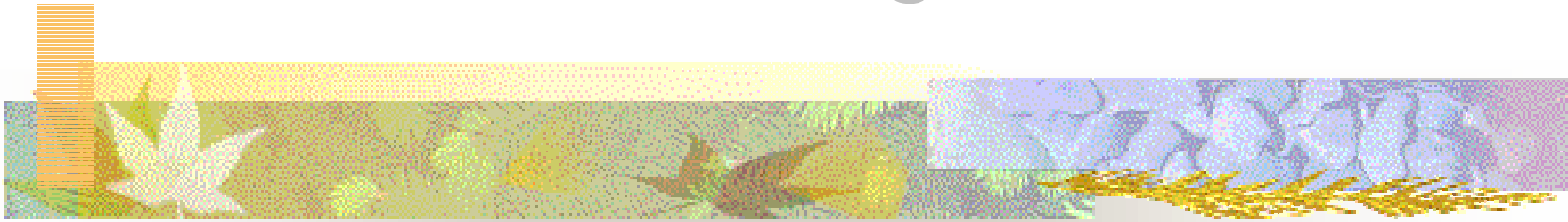


# Patterns of Organization



Separating supporting points from main ideas is an important reading skill. The organization of the supporting details will help you understand how an author thinks. Detecting the patterns of organization of the major and minor details can help with comprehension and retention.



# The main idea...

The thesis or main idea is usually a good predictor of the organization of an essay or paragraph.

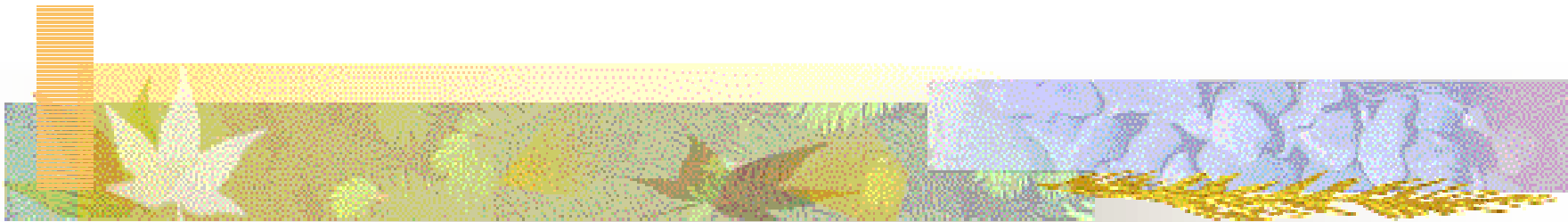
Main Idea	Text
Topic sentence	Paragraph
Thesis	Essay
Theme	Story or Novel



# Patterns of organization

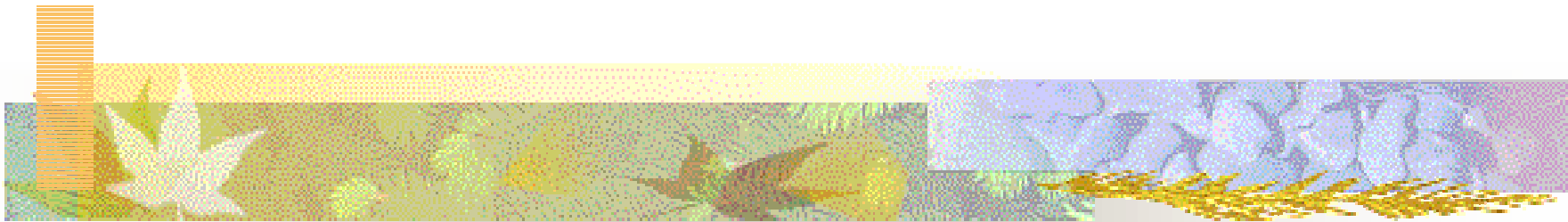
- Time Order
- List of Items
- Comparison and/or Contrast
- Cause and Effect
- Definition and Example
- Classification
- Order of Importance
- Problem - Solution
- Process
- Mixed Patterns

# Signal Words



Signal words, also known as *transitions*, are words which indicate the relationship between ideas, and the organization of the details.

# Time Order



Also known and *chronological order, steps and stages, narration* or *sequence of events*, in this pattern, ideas are presented in the order in which they occurred in time.

## Questions Answered:

“When did it happen?”

“In what order did it happen?”

## When Used:

Commonly used in anthropology, history, art history and political science.

It answers the questions relating to time.

## Thesis Example:

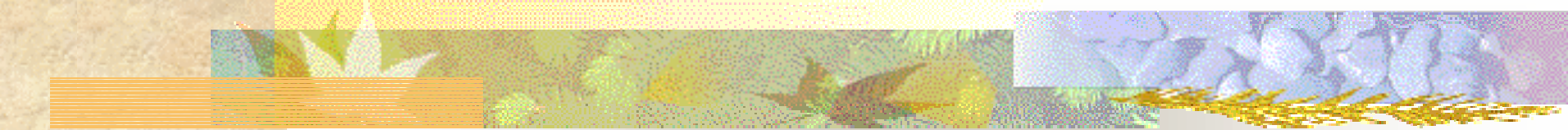
Between now and the election, the candidate will make a number of campaign stops throughout the U.S.





# Time order signal words

- first, third...; next; then; finally; eventually; following this

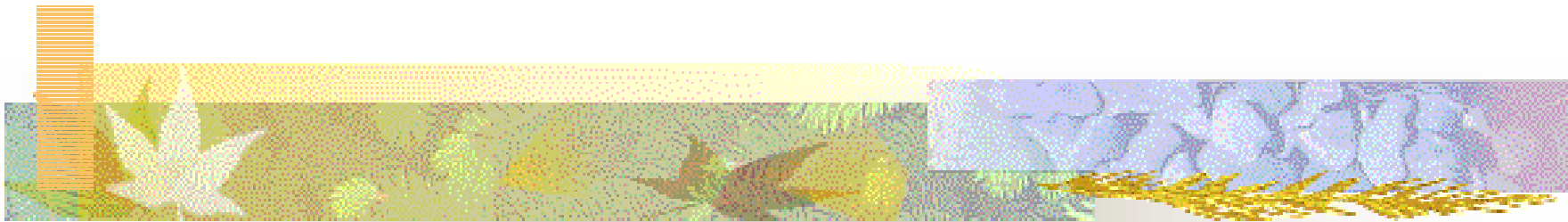


The famous Leaning Tower of Pisa has been tilting for over 800 years, and recent improvements should allow it to continue tilting for another 300 more. *On August 9, 1173*, construction began on this well known Italian bell tower. *Almost immediately*, it began leaning because it was being erected on the soft silt of a buried riverbed. *Between 1178 and 1360*, work stopped and started two more times as workers tried to continue the project and figure out how to compensate for the tilt. *Over the next six centuries*, the tower's lean continued to increase, although tourists were still allowed to visit. *Then, in 1990*, Italy's prime minister feared the tower would collapse and closed it to the public. *From 1999 to 2001*, engineers excavated soil from beneath the tower. **Now**, the tower still leans out about 15 feet beyond its base, but it should remain stable for several more centuries.

Covington, Richard (2001) *Smithsonian*. "The Leaning Tower Straightens Up," p41-47



# List of Items



Also known as *listing*, *series*, *addition* and *enumeration*, the information listed may be items, facts, reasons, examples, features or characteristics.

## Questions Answered:

“What examples support the main idea?”

“What proof is there?”

## When Used:

Commonly used in history, art history, the social sciences and political science.

It answers the questions regarding the appropriate proof, back-up or support.

## Thesis Example:

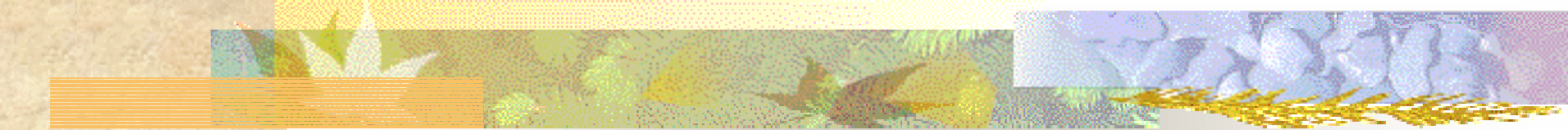
Managers experience a number of different personnel problems that must be solved before a department can work effectively.





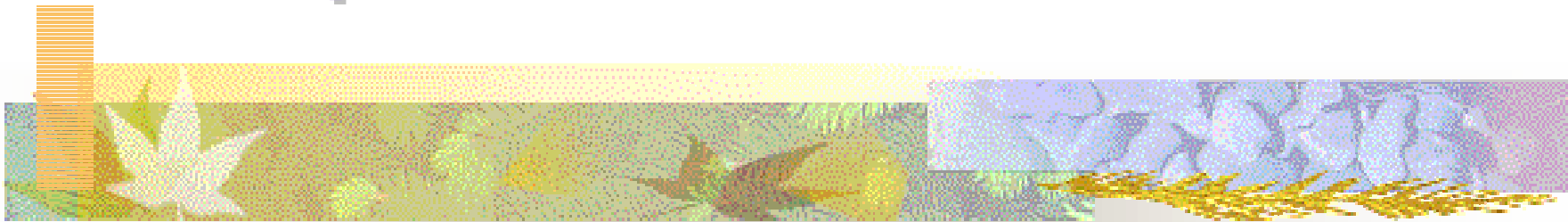
# List of items signal words

- And, too, in addition, moreover, or, also, furthermore, as well as, plus, in fact, moreover, besides...



Many modern people are turning themselves into social victims. *One example* is a Tennessee woman who is suing McDonald's because she was badly burned on the chin by a hot pickle in her hamburger. A Canadian woman is *another example*. She wants to ban the South Park television show because her son Kenny is victimized by the show's Kenny character, who is killed in each episode. A *third example* is a group of European and Australian women who want to ban urinals in men's restrooms because they require men to stand in a way that suggests violence toward women. *Another* group argues that single people are victimized because society ignores them.

# Comparison and/or Contrast



The material is organized to emphasize the **similarities** and/or **differences** between two or more items or topics .

Readings answer the questions:

“How are two items similar?”

“How are two items different?”

**When Used:** All Disciplines

The items being considered usually fit into the same general category.



**Thesis Example:**

Gangs and fraternities share many characteristics, but are quite different.



# comparison means

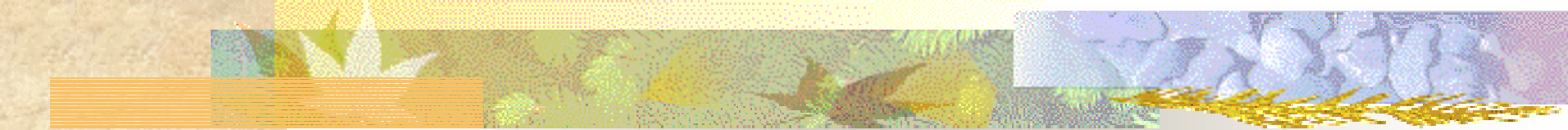
- what things have in common
- how items or concepts are alike
- the similarities between elements or ideas



# contrast means

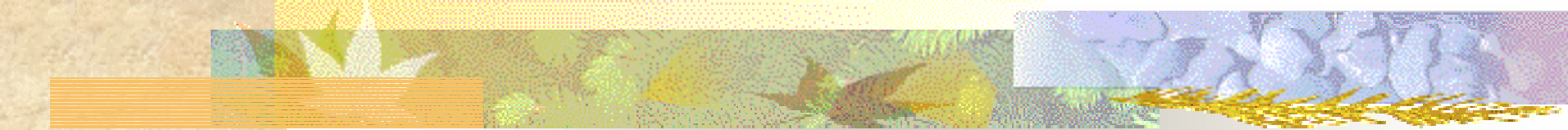
- the differences between items or concepts
- how things are not alike
- distinctions between elements





# Comparison and contrast signal words

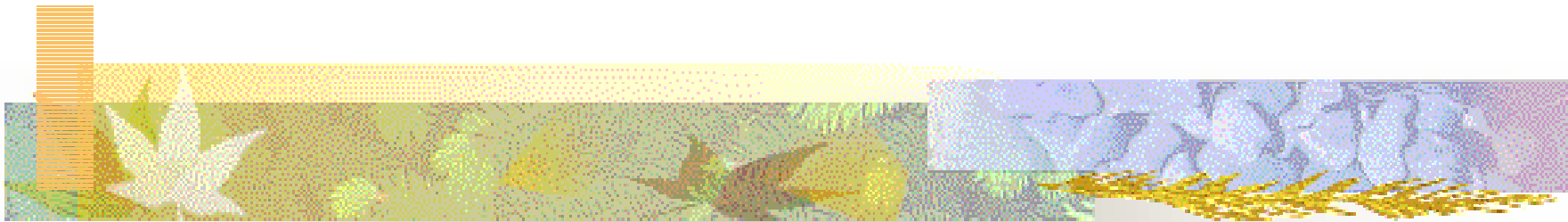
- Similarly, like, the same as, compared to, in the same way, likewise...
- but, yet, on the other hand, however, instead, nevertheless, on the contrary...



My two children are so *different* that it surprises me every day. For one thing, my older child is a girl, and my younger child is a boy. My daughter loves reading, going to the movies, and writing in her journal. My son, *on the other hand*, loves running, jumping, and swimming—anything that requires using energy. My daughter loves all different kinds of foods, but my son likes to eat only pizza. And *while* my son can't go a day without watching some kind of sporting event on television, my daughter will only watch a baseball game if nothing else is on.

Adapted from O Magazine, (2001) "Set Yourself Free," p37.

# Cause and Effect



This pattern describes or discusses an event or action that is caused by another event or action. On occasion, this pattern is also referred to as *result*.

Readings answer the questions:

“Why did something happen?”

“What were the results of a particular event?”

**When Used:** All Disciplines

**Thesis Example:** Research has shown that birth defects have various causes.





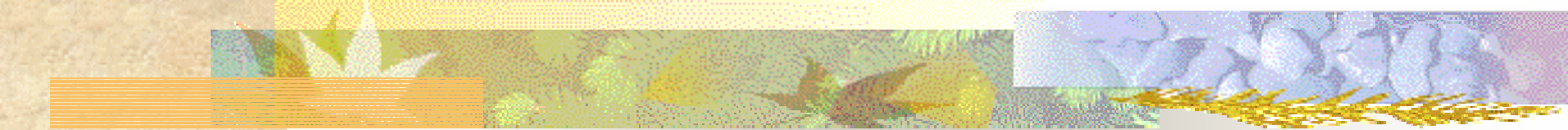
# Cause and effect signal words

- because, for this reason, due to, cause, on account of, if this, then this...
- as a result, since, consequently, therefore, thus, in effect, resulting, and the outcome is...



## There are four possible cause-effect relationships:

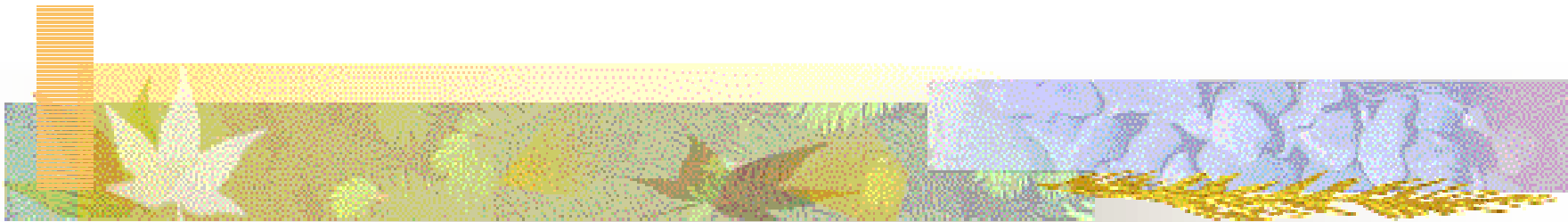
- single cause - single effect
- single cause - multiple effects
- multiple causes - single effect
- multiple causes - multiple effects



Smoking is the single most preventable risk factor for fatal illnesses in the United States. Indeed, cigarette smoking *accounts for* more deaths than all other drugs, car accidents, suicides, homicides, and fires combined. Further, nonsmokers who inhale smoke from other people's cigarettes *face an elevated risk* for lung cancer and other illnesses related to the lungs, a fact that has *given rise to* a nonsmokers' rights movement in the United States.

Bernstein, et al., (1999) *Psychology*, p473

# Definition and Example



This pattern is found primarily in textbooks; a word or concept is introduced then explained or described. An example of its usage then follows. The pattern is very close to *illustration* or *description*.



Readings answer the question:

“What is it?”

**When Used:** All Disciplines

Terms are often in boldface print with the definition in the body of the text, in the margin, and in a glossary at the end of the text.

**Thesis Example:** *Ragtime* music is a style that developed at the turn of the twentieth century. Played primarily by piano, the “Rocking Horse Rag” is an excellent short sample of ragtime.





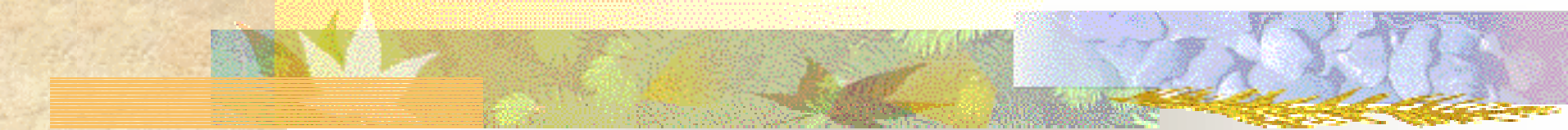
## Definition and example signal words

- define as, is, known, the term means, is stated as, is used to mean...
- for example, to illustrate, for instance, such as, specifically...
- i.e., e.g.



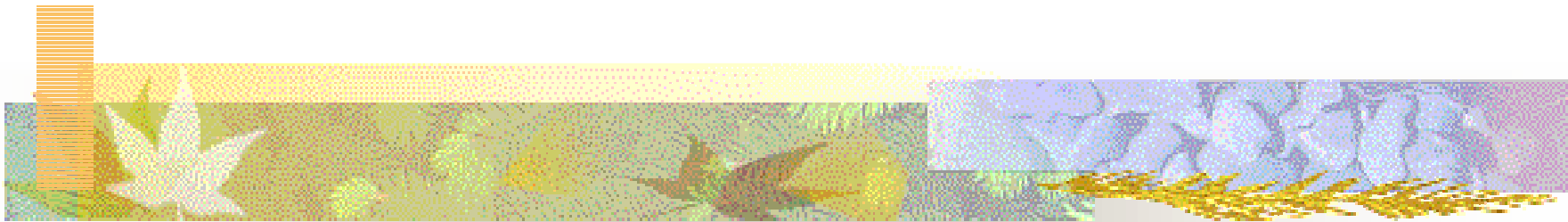
# A definition and example has three components:

- key term (often **boldfaced**, underlined or in *italics*)
- definition
- example



*Acrophobia* is an *intense, unreasonable fear of high places*. People with acrophobia exhibit emotional and physical symptoms in response to being at great heights. *For instance*, one sufferer of extreme acrophobia, Andrea Copeland, is unable to go above the third floor of any building without feeling enormous anxiety. Her acrophobia began one evening when she was working alone in her office on the eighth floor of a large building. Suddenly she was struck with terror. She gathered her things and left the building, Yet, she still has no rational explanation for her fear, which is also typical of this type of phobia.

# Classification



This pattern is also widely used in textbooks; classification, also known as *division* or *categorization*, divides a topic into parts that are based on shared or common characteristics.

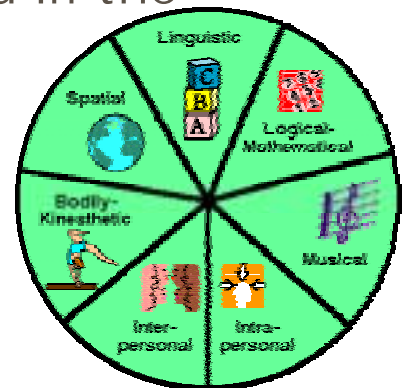
## Readings answer the questions:

“How do the parts work with the whole?”

Ex: What part does an editor play in the publication of a magazine?

**When Used:** All Disciplines

**Thesis Examples:** There are many people involved in the publishing of a magazine.





# Classification signal words

- Categories, classifications, groups, classes, ways, elements, features, kinds, types, varieties, methods...



# The Ordovician

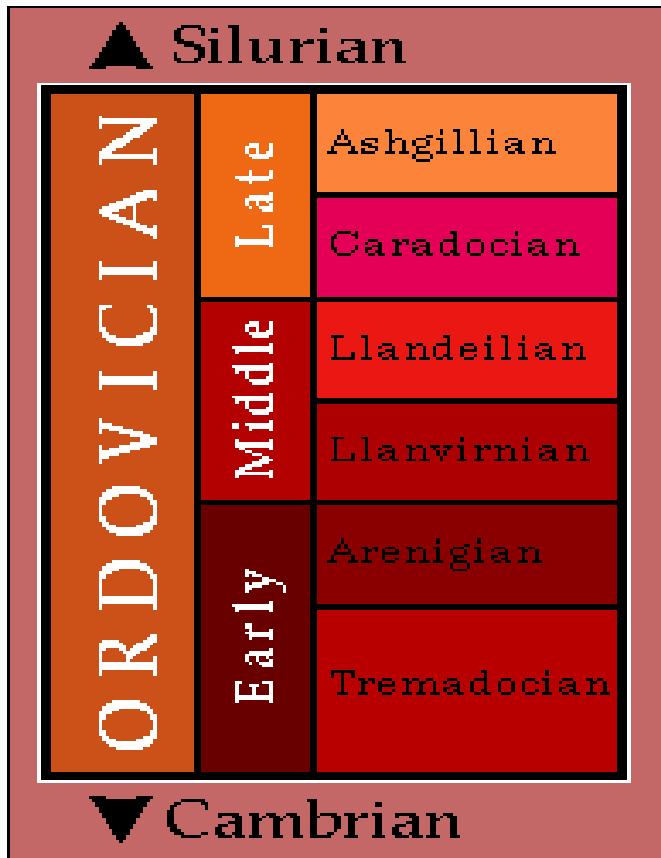
505 to 440 Million Years Ago

The Ordovician period began approximately 510 million years ago, with the end of the Cambrian, and ended around 445 million years ago, with the beginning of the Silurian. The Ordovician is classified into three parts: late, middle, and early. There are two groups in each part. In the late part, Ashgillian and Caradocian. In the middle part there are the Llandeilian and Llanvirnian. The early part is made of the Arenigian and Tremadocian groups.



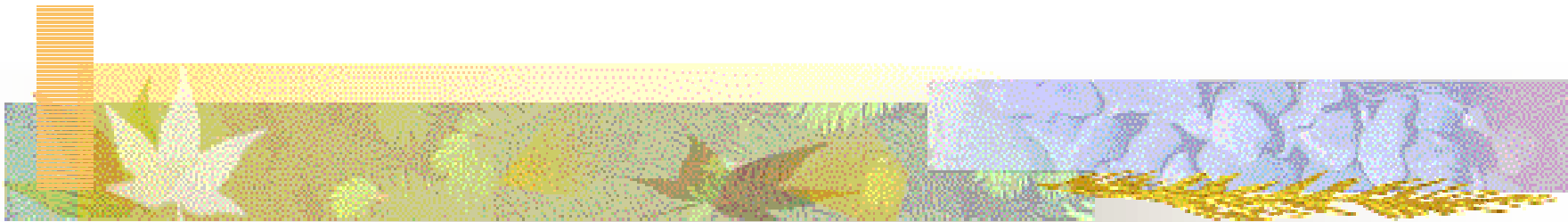
# The Ordovician

505 to 440 Million Years Ago



- Classification is often accompanied by a graphic or visual aid to help clarify the categories.
- The chart at right shows the major subdivisions of the Ordovician Period.

# Order of Importance



In this pattern the information is given either from the **least important feature to the most important**, or from the **most important to the least important**. This pattern is also known as **hierarchical** or **chain of command**.

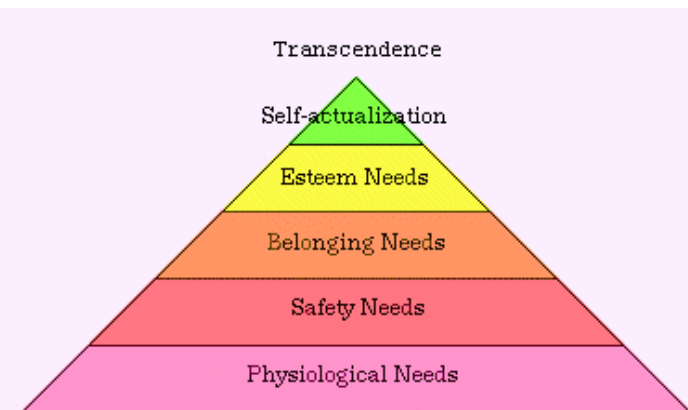
Readings answer the questions:

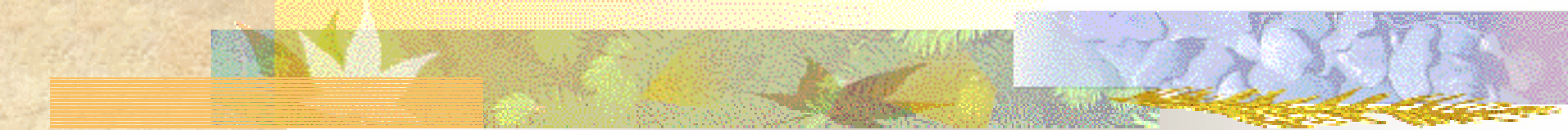
“Which point is the most/least important?”

“Which element is crucial?”

**When Used:** The sciences, particularly in laboratory texts and experiments.

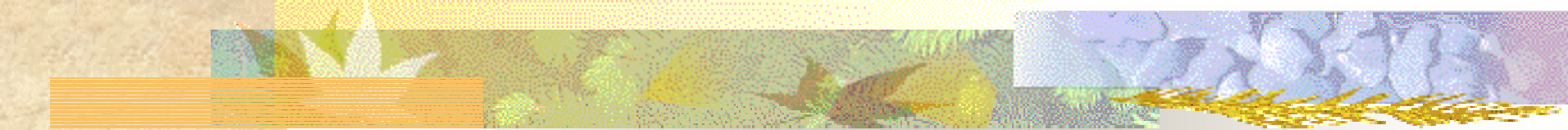
**Thesis Example:** While the most basic need is physiological, workers aspire to self-actualization as their most valued need.





## Order of importance signal words

- central, principal, chief, major, main, key, primary, significant...
- finally, lastly, finishing with, ending with, least...



Almost everyone in the United States files a tax return. There are several things that should be done during the year, beginning with *the most basic and fundamental*; keep copies of the tax return, W-2 statement and 1099 forms. It is also wise to keep seven years' worth of documentation in files, just in case there is an audit. Keep and compare figures on tax return to the Social Security statement. Also, retain a record of yearly medical expenses. But all of this is dependent of one crucial act. It is *supremely important* to keep all permanent records stored in an impregnable place, such as a fireproof strongbox.

# Problem and Solution



The text presents a significant problem and explains it in detail. Then, a possible solution is proposed. Sometimes, only the problem is presented because there is no solution.



Readings answer the questions:

"What is the problem?"

"What is a possible solution?"

**When Used:** Often in essays and editorials

The items being considered usually fit into the same general category.

**Thesis example:** Since pollution has a detrimental impact on modern living standards, a key solution is increased recycling of waste products.

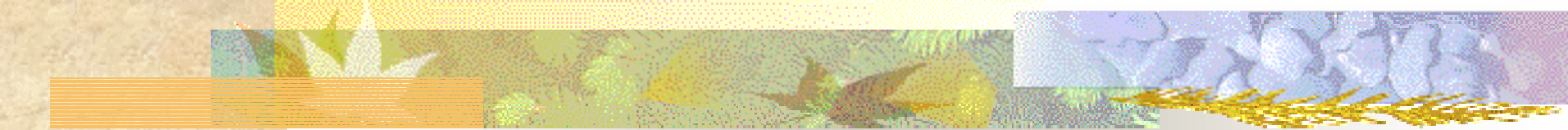




# Problem and Solution signal words

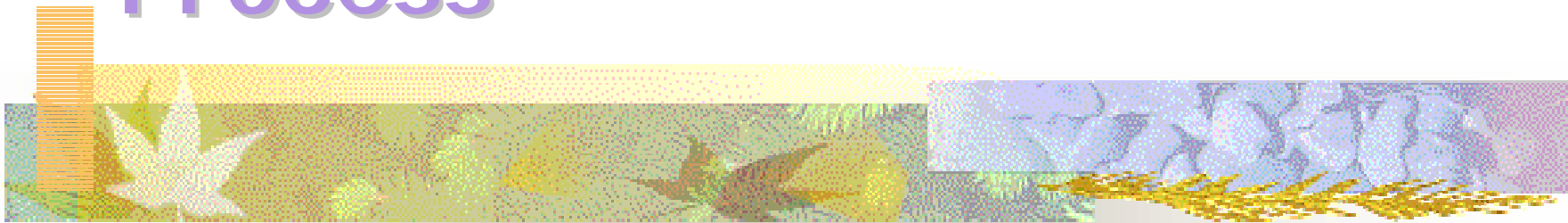
- problem, need, difficulty, dilemma, enigma, challenge, issue
- answer, propose, suggest, indicate, solve, resolve, improve, plan, respond to a need





The growth of urban areas exacerbated many *problems*, including the absence of clean drinking water, the lack of cheap public transportation, and most importantly, poor sanitation. Sanitation problems led to heavy urban mortality rates and frequent epidemics of typhoid, dysentery, typhus, cholera, and yellow fever. Government officials, recognizing the *need* for improvement, initiated the return to suburban and rural areas. The *proposal* involved several cost effective *solutions*. Local village water delivery systems were improved, and as villages were substantially smaller, almost everything was in walking distance, thereby eliminating the need for public transportation.

# Process



In this pattern the information explains the steps in a particular procedure or process. The steps and stages lead up to a final product or finished project

Readings answer the questions:

"How?"

"In what sequence or order?"

**When Used:** All disciplines, particularly technical textbooks.

The items being considered usually fit into the same general category.

**Thesis Example:**


The moth and butterfly undergo several changes between hatching from an egg to mature adulthood.





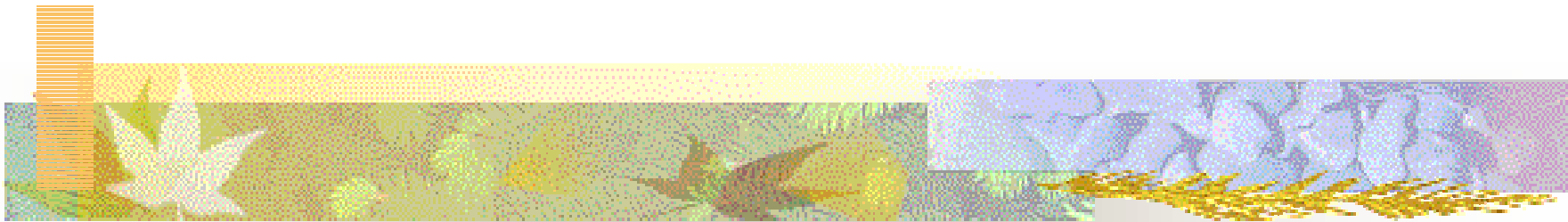
# Process signal words

- how to, in the process of, the following steps
- first, second, third...



Time order and Process use overlapping signal words. Both patterns organize points in time, but for different reasons. Process ends with a specific predetermined outcome.

# Mixed Patterns



In the real world, many texts contain sections and passages that combine two or more patterns of organization. This is perfectly normal and acceptable. You may incorporate blended patterns in your writing.



# Patterns of Organization

- Arrangement of the details
- Patterns assist with remembering major details
- Help indicate what the author thinks is important