

# ORGANISING IDEAS FOR AN ESSAY

# THESIS

- ▣ A *thesis statement* is a statement that tells you and your reader what you plan to write about. It is usually one sentence in the introduction to your paper. It tells the main idea of your paper. It might also give the reader an idea of the type of organization and the tone that you plan to use in your paper. Often a thesis statement is an answer to a question. Often it is a statement that you set out to prove. A thesis does not have to be only one sentence long. In some papers, it is appropriate to have a two- or three-sentence thesis.
- ▣ Before you begin writing, you should have an idea of what your thesis is. You don't have to have the exact thesis statement that you will put in your final paper, but you do need to have the gist written in a tentative form because it lets you organize your thoughts and the rest of the information in your paper.

# EXAMPLES

- ▣ **Writing assignment:** *Describe one of your most important accomplishments in life.*

**Tentative thesis:** One of my most important accomplishments in life was surviving a winter in Siberia.

- ▣ You have just studied cancer and cancer cells in your biology class. Your teacher gives you the following writing assignment.

**Writing assignment:** *Think about how cancer cells are different from normal cells. Based on these differences, explain why it has been so difficult to find a cure for cancer.*

**Tentative thesis:** Cancer cells do not respond to the body's ordinary controls on cell growth and division as normal cells do. Thus, a cure for cancer must prevent cancer cells from dividing uncontrollably while allowing normal cells to divide normally. Finding a way to stop cell growth and division in cancer cells without interfering in normal cell division has proved a difficult task for cancer researchers.

# Qualities of thesis

What if your writing assignment doesn't give you a question to start with? If your writing assignment is open-ended, you might have to work a little harder at finding a thesis. This is where your topic exploration from the last lesson should come in handy. A good thesis statement will:

- say something that interests both you and your audience.
- be as specific as you can make it.
- focus and narrow your topic.
- address one main idea.
- give your audience a guide to what is coming up.
- help you test your ideas about your topic.
- help you organize what you will say in your paper.
- tell both you and your audience what your conclusion on the topic is.
- often take a position on an issue or answer a question.

# Supporting ideas

- Once you have a tentative thesis, it's time to focus on what you want to say about the thesis and how you will support it. The first step is to list the main ideas you want to express in your paper. Then you will need to link each main idea with supporting details. Supporting details are pieces of information that you can use to make your main points. Examples of types of supporting details are listed below.

## **Types of Supporting Details**

**Anecdotes**—stories or descriptions of experiences you have had or heard about

**Examples**—specific instances of a general idea

**Facts**—statements that can be verified in reference materials (such as databases, dictionaries, encyclopedias, college textbooks, or other specialized sources), through interviews with experts, or by making direct observations

**Opinions**—judgments and predictions, especially those of experts

**Quotations**—word-for-word statements made by other people, such as experts

**Statistics**—facts that are written as percentages, ratios, or in other numeric forms

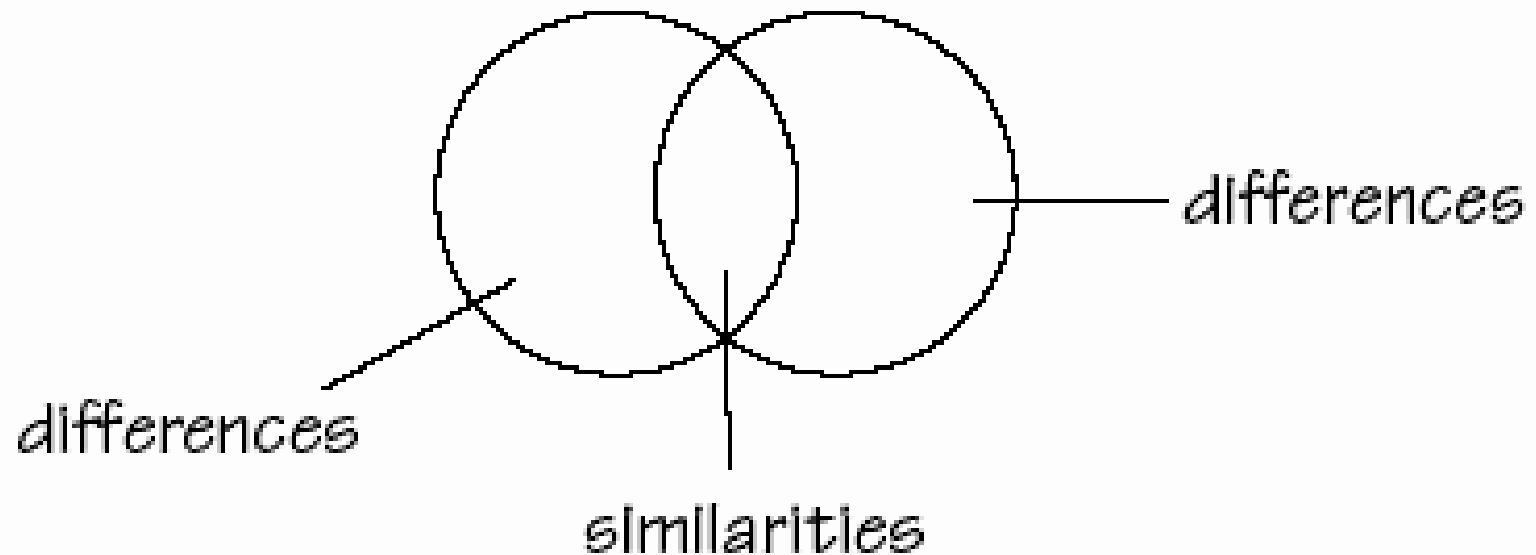
# Graphic organisers

- ▣ Venn diagrams
- ▣ Spider maps
- ▣ Series maps
- ▣ Timelines
- ▣ Hierarchical maps
- ▣ Sequence charts

# Venn diagram

- ▣ Venn diagrams are commonly used to show how two or more things are alike and different. This type of diagram might help you organize your supporting details for a comparison and contrast paragraph.

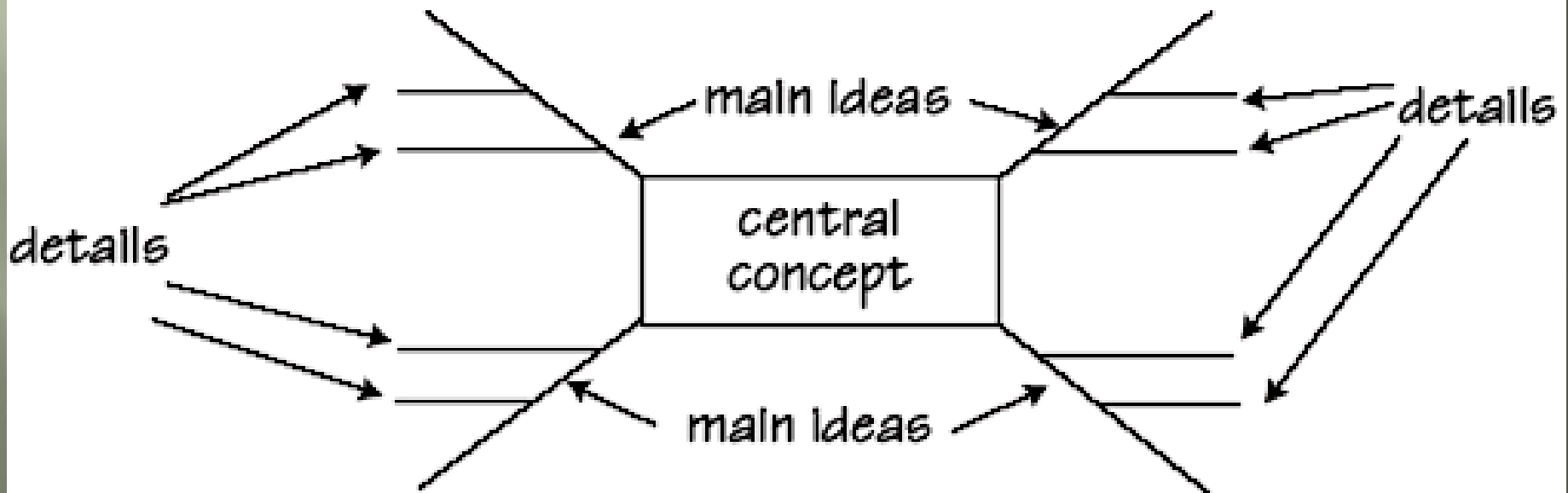
*VENN DIAGRAM: to organize similarities and differences*



# Spider maps

- Spider maps are often used to describe one central concept. You might use this type of diagram to organize your supporting details for a paper describing a person or an event. For example, you might use a spider map when writing a paper about a specific character in a piece of literature you have read.

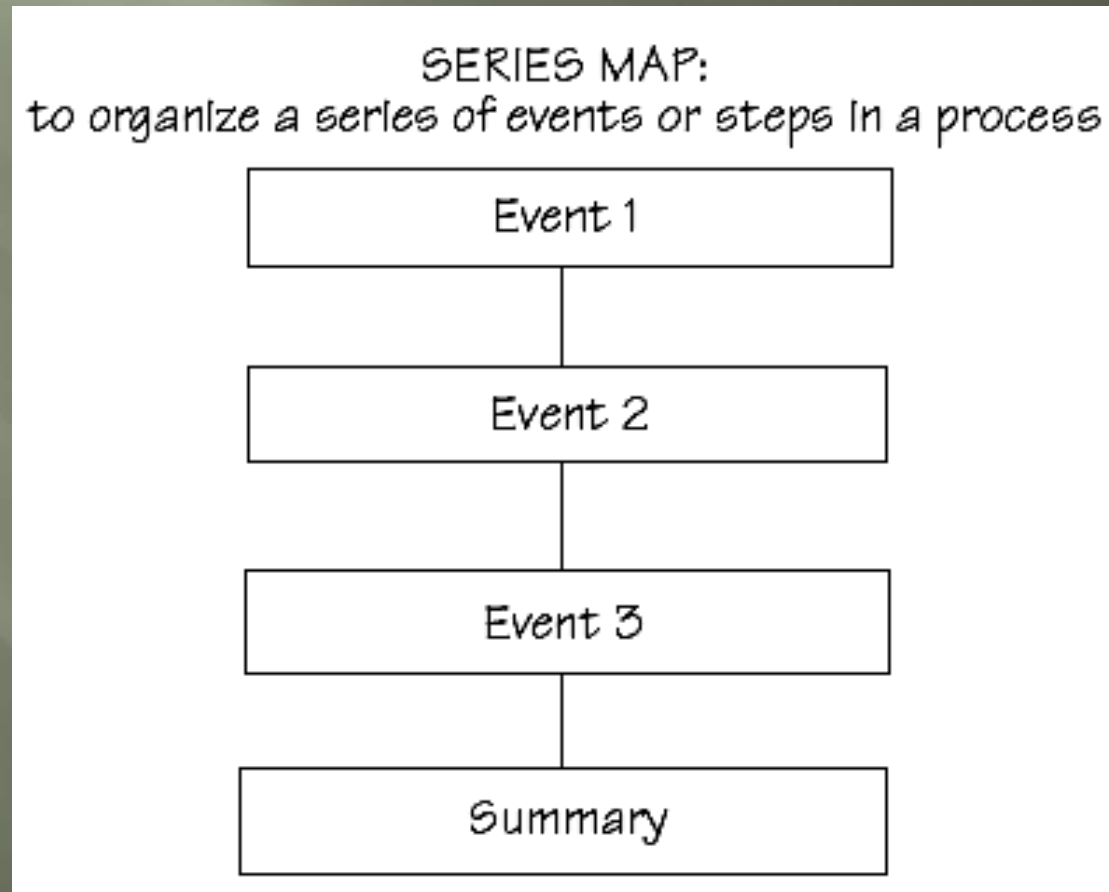
**SPIDER MAP: to describe one central concept**





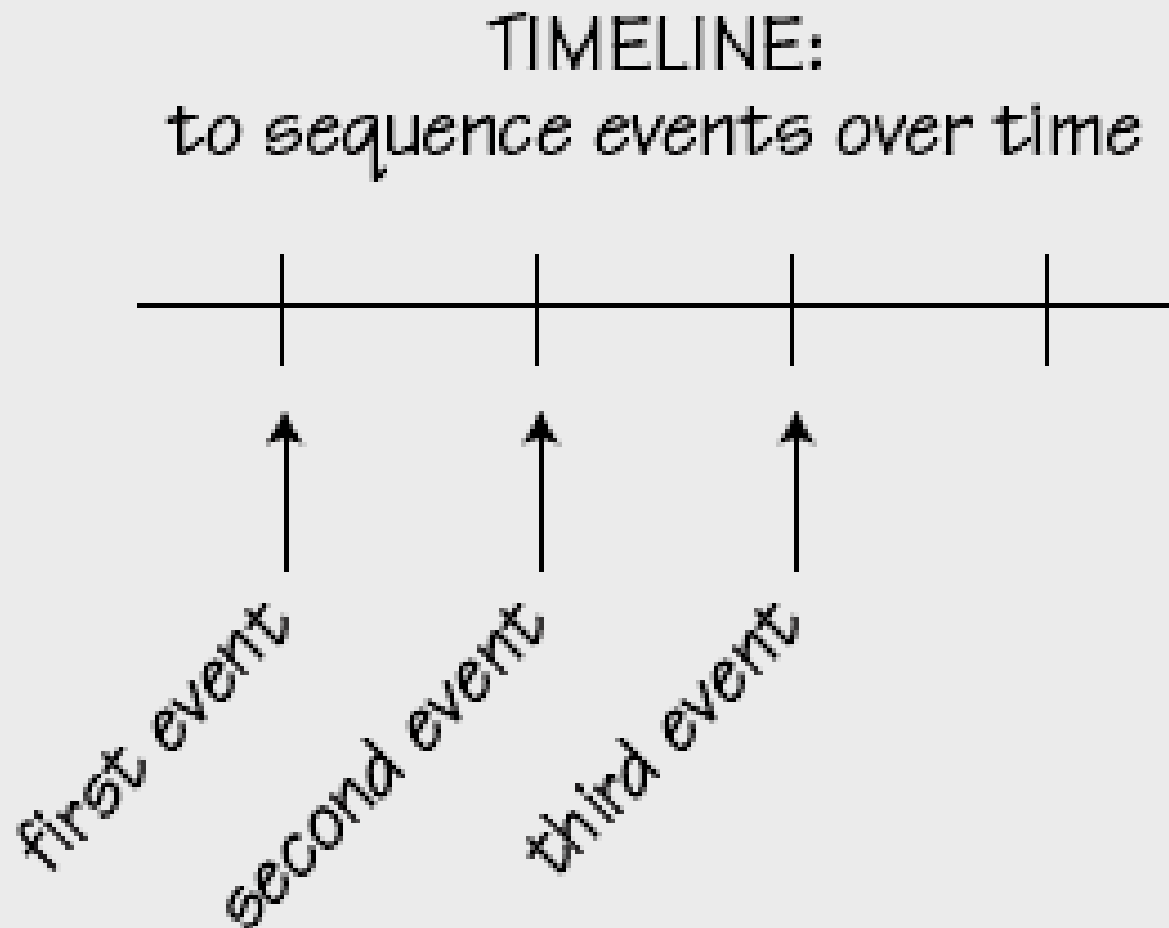
# Series maps

- ▣ Series maps are often used to organize a series of events or the steps in a process. You could use this type of diagram to help you organize the information you plan to put in a how-to paper or to explain a multi-step process.



# Timelines

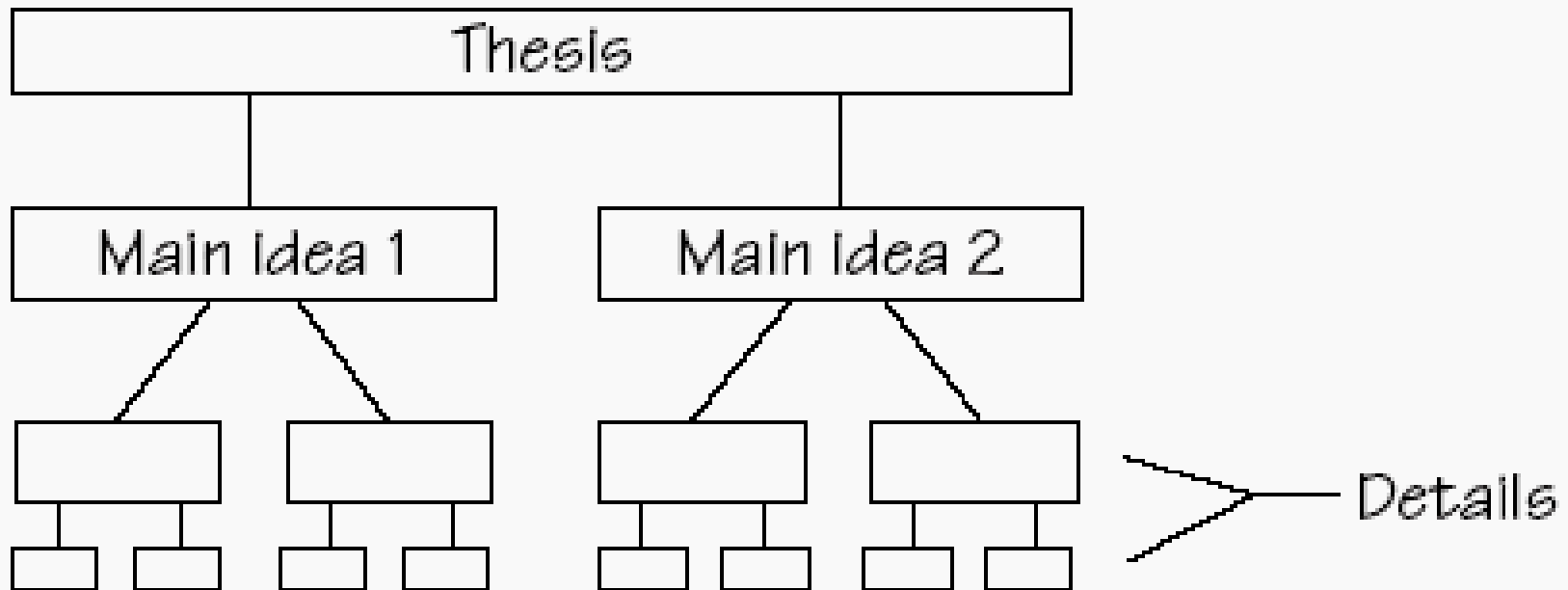
- Timelines are good for organizing chronological information. You might use a timeline to help you organize the information you plan to put in a history paper or to organize the events that lead up to the climax in a novel.



# Hierarchical maps

- ▣ These diagrams are very typical in composition classes. They are a good way to organize your arguments in a persuasive piece of writing.

## HIERARCHICAL MAP



# Sequence charts

- ▣ Like timelines and series maps, sequence charts can be useful in organizing items that follow a specific sequence, such as events and steps. For example, you could use a sequence chart to organize information about the phases in a scientific process.

SEQUENCE CHART:  
*to sequence events*



# TYPES OF LOGICAL ORGANIZATION

- ❑ CHRONOLOGICAL OR SEQUENTIAL ORDER – telling what did, should, or will happen first, second, third, and so on
- ❑ CAUSE AND EFFECT – telling how events (causes) result in other events (effects) or telling about events (effects) and then explaining why they happened (causes)
- ❑ COMPARE AND CONTRAST – telling how ideas are alike and different
- ❑ ORDER OF DEGREE – telling how different ideas can be ranked in importance, familiarity, complexity, and so on
- ❑ SPATIAL ORDER – telling how things are arranged in space (for example, top to bottom, bottom to top, near to far, inside out, and so on)
- ❑ You can use these organizational structures for your entire paper, or just for a portion of your paper. You might choose more than one structure, depending on the purpose of different parts of your paper.

# OUTLINE

You've probably been asked to write an outline for a paper before, and this thought might make you cringe. If you've gotten this far in the prewriting process, however, you probably already have an outline – an informal one. If you have a tentative thesis and have sketched out your main ideas and supporting details in a graphic organizer, in a list, or in any way that makes sense to you, then you have an informal outline. An outline is just a guide for what you will say in your paper.

A more formal outline might look like this one.

- ▣ THESIS: Anthony's funeral oration in the play *Julius Caesar* shows several forms of emotional appeal.
- ▣ I. He captures his audience's attention by repeating nice ideas that are contrary to his intentions.
- ▣ II. He plays on the crowd's impatience and creates a sense of curiosity and anxiety.
- ▣ III. He makes the audience feel ashamed for the bad way they've treated the dead Caesar.
- ▣ IV. He uses emotionally charged words and examples of Caesar's good qualities to show that Caesar was not that ambitious.
- ▣ CONCLUSION: Anthony uses several forms of emotionalism to manipulate his audience.

# How to make up an outline?

Why should you bother making an outline before writing? First, an outline helps you think through what you will say, so it can save you time when you actually start writing. In addition, it can show omissions in your paper. An outline can even help you avoid writer's block! One of the most important reasons to do an outline before you start writing is to help you evaluate your thesis. Is your thesis narrow enough? Is it too broad? Can you support it adequately? Here's how to use your outline to test your prewriting material.

- If you have more to say than you can fit in your outline, you probably need to refocus your thesis statement. It's too broad.
- If you can't find enough to say in your outline, your thesis is probably too narrow. You should consider making it broader.
- If you've tried different ways of exploring and researching your topic and you still can't find enough evidence to support your thesis, you should reconsider your thesis. You might want to write a new thesis that you can support.
- If your outline is still sound after putting it to this test, then you are ready to start writing.