

Essay Structuring Patterns

1. Alternating method: Point-by-point pattern

In the alternating method, you find related points common to your central subjects A and B, and alternate between A and B on the basis of these points (ABABAB ...).

For instance, a comparative essay on the French and Russian revolutions might examine how both revolutions either encouraged or thwarted innovation in terms of new technology, military strategy, and the administrative system.

A Paragraph 1 in body new technology and the French Revolution
B Paragraph 2 in body new technology and the Russian Revolution
A Paragraph 3 in body military strategy and the French Revolution
B Paragraph 4 in body military strategy and the Russian Revolution
A Paragraph 5 in body administrative system and the French Revolution
B Paragraph 6 in body administrative system and the Russian Revolution

The French and Russian revolutions (A and B) may be *dissimilar* rather than *similar* in the way they affected innovation in any of the three areas of technology, military strategy, and administration. *To use the alternating method, you just need to have something noteworthy to say about both A and B in each area.* Finally, you may certainly include more than three pairs of alternating points.

When do I use the alternating method?

Professors often like the alternating system because it tends to produce a more tightly integrated and analytical paper. Consider the alternating method if you are able to identify clearly related points between A and B.

2. Block method: Subject-by-subject pattern

In the block method (AB), you discuss all of A, then all of B.

Let's apply the block method to the comparison between the French and Russian revolutions:

A Paragraphs 1–3 in body How the French Revolution encouraged or thwarted innovation
B Paragraphs 4–6 in body How the Russian Revolution encouraged or thwarted innovation

If you use the block method, **do not** append two disconnected essays to an introductory thesis. *The B block, or second half of your essay, should refer to the A block, or first half, and make clear points of comparison whenever comparisons are relevant.* (“Unlike A, B . . .” or “Like A, B . . .”)

When do I use the block method?

- ✓ You are unable to find points about A and B that are closely related to each other.
- ✓ Your ideas about B build upon or extend your ideas about A.
- ✓ You are comparing three or more subjects as opposed to the traditional two.

