

Chapter 13: The Classification Essay

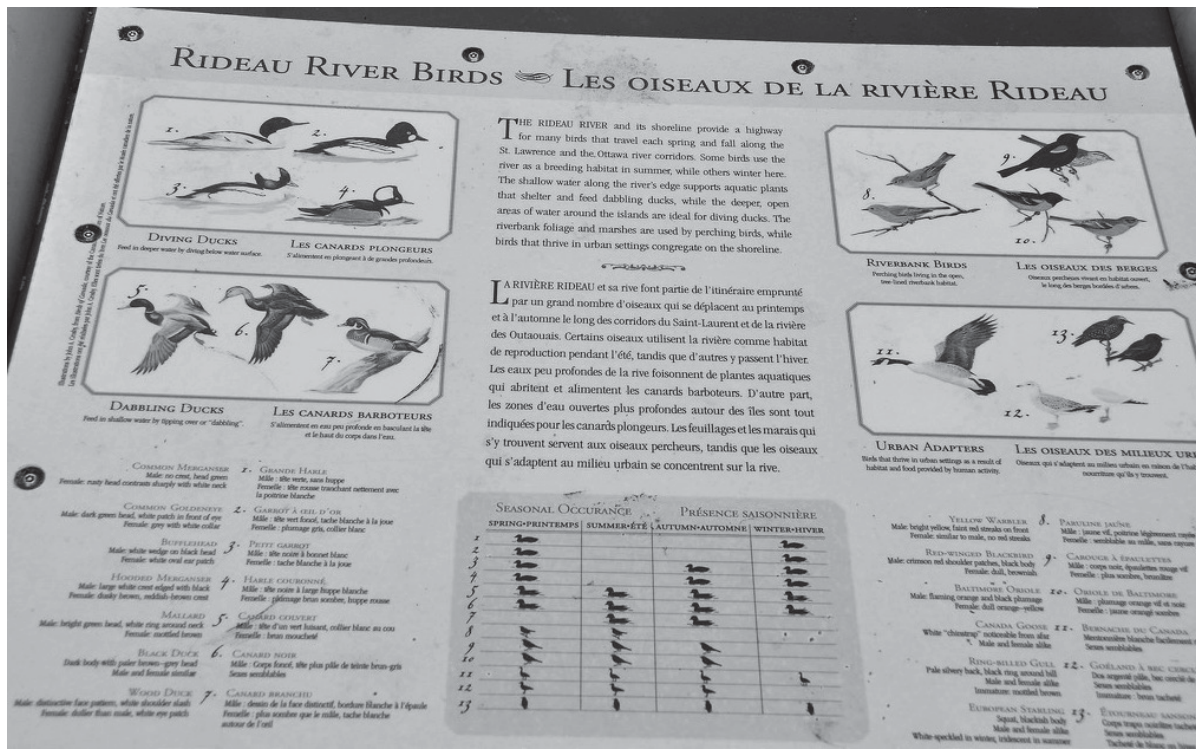


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Why Write a Classification/Division Essay?

If you have ever done laundry, you have probably divided and classified items. You sort your clothes: whites in one pile, colors in another, jeans all together. If you browse the car ads, you might look at SUVs, sedans, and sports cars. When we study science, we group together or categorize species, for example, in the animal kingdom: mammals, reptiles, birds, fish, and amphibians. We express preferences when we choose preferred categories of music: rock, country, rap and so on. Classification is important because it helps us understand the world.

Sorting mechanisms help us organize and understand complexities. Imagine attempting to sign up for your college classes and finding an online list of all the classes the college offered but no categories, where English composition came before calculus but after world politics. Imagine going grocery shopping in a store where the shampoo was next to the apples, and the deodorant was next to the ground beef. Without items being divided in categories, the world would be chaotic. We expect apples to be in the produce section, shampoo and deodorant in the personal hygiene section, and ground beef in the meat section.

Understanding the Basics of Classification (elements appear in bold)

This is the first key to sorting a group into categories. In what ways can you divide the whole? Although animals can be divided scientifically, creative thinking can find new ways to classify. For example, animals could be classified as those with feet, those with wings, and those with fins to

explain how they get around. In the previous example, how animals “get around” is the **single principle** on which the division is based.

After determining your single principle, make sure your categories have **covered the whole**. In other words, as the old expression states, “divide the whole pie.” Make sure all the items in the large group fit into one of the determined categories. In sorting the laundry, is there a category missing? Beside white, dark, and jeans, some would argue a fourth category, delicates, is needed.

Next, each category in the group must fit into that **distinct and separate** group. Determine the distinguishing features of each group and make sure the categories do not overlap. Do all animals move through the world with feet, wings or fins? For example, some animals with legs are rumored to “fly,” such as the flying squirrel, but actually the squirrel glides and doesn’t have wings. Bats, on the other hand, have feet but don’t walk on them; they use their wings to propel themselves. Finally, **balance your categories** with equal details, examples, and evidence. Don’t prefer one group and treat it in more depth than the others.

The Thesis Statement

The thesis statement in a classification essay often identifies the classified groups. Further, it should make an assertion about the relevance or importance of the groups. Students will need to develop clear and concise thesis statements that identify the point and purpose of the essay while breaking the subjects down into logically developed paragraphs. Thesis statements should always be written in third person. There are two kinds of thesis statements: a basic thesis statement and a listing or mapping thesis statement.

Basic Thesis Statement

Although the animals of the Earth have distinct environments, how they move through their varying environments is based not on the habitat, but on the method of propulsion.

The basic thesis statement identifies the topic and makes an assertion about the topic, stating the position of the writer.

Listing or Mapping Thesis Statement

Animals move through their environments in one of three ways: by feet, wings, or fins.

The mapping thesis statement identifies the topic (animals), makes an assertion about the topic (move through their environments in one of three ways) and lists the categories (feet, wings, and fins).

Basic Structure

Introduction

The introduction is the hook. It grabs the reader’s attention and provides engagement in the topic. As with many rhetorical strategies, topics can be introduced by telling a story that is related to the topic, asking a question that the thesis answers, asking a rhetorical question that has no answer but introduces the reader to the subject matter. Usually, the final sentence of the introduction is the thesis statement.

Body Paragraphs

Each category in the classification needs its own paragraph. In addition, if the categories are mentioned in a mapping thesis statement, follow the order established in the thesis statement. In developing each category, explain the specifics that make the category, provide examples of things that fall into the category, and evidence of those distinctions.

Conclusion

Conclusions address key points in the essay and tie the introduction to the conclusion.

Your conclusion should not just restate the thesis; it should comment on the significance of the thesis. What does your reader know now after reading your essay that wasn't known before?

For more explanation regarding introductions, conclusions and thesis statements, refer to Chapter 6.

No sample student essays are available for this rhetorical strategy.

Tips for Writing the Classification Essay

The most important issue in classification is making your categories distinct and unique from each other. Students must refine any overlapping categories to make the grouping effective. In addition, make sure your examples within the individual categories fit the description of that category.

Topic Ideas

- Types of pets
- Video games
- Careers in your field of interest
- High school cliques
- Personal electronic devices
- Sports
- Ways to watch movies or TV shows
- Study strategies
- Personalities

Chapter Questions for Comprehension

Answer the following questions regarding the classification essay referring to the previous information presented here. Be sure to use complete sentences.

1. What are the key elements of the classification essay? Describe them briefly.
2. What one new writing strategy did you learn by reading the chapter?