

Classification and Division

Classification and division are forms of analysis used often by most of us even if we do not know the name of the techniques. Although they are methods of expository writing, classification and division are also ways of looking at the world around us and of thinking about things. Like illustration and comparison and contrast, classification is a process that involves bringing order out of experience. Like these other methods of expository writing, classification and division are concerned with the general (class) and the relationship to its parts.

Almost all parts fall into a class of some kind, sharing certain characteristics that allow these parts to be classified with a certain group. Thus, a class is determined by a network of significant characteristics shared by all members of the category. If you see a heavysset man about 25 years old walking down the street, you will probably pass by him without thinking about him much. Put him into a blue uniform and give him a badge and a gun, and you will both notice him and make judgments about him (he is a police officer, or he is a fascist pig cop). If the man is not dressed in a uniform but is carrying a baby, you think of him as a father and assume that the woman with him is his wife and the mother of the child. In each of these cases you are classifying the man; you are putting him into a category and seeing him as a part of a whole (class). He is a policeman, father or husband. We are always classifying that which we experience in the world around us even when we have not the slightest intention of writing an essay of classification.

In the same way, *division* is a way of thinking about and reacting to our world. We know that things have parts, and we talk about things in terms of those parts. In fact, we often define terms by identifying the parts that make up those terms. A sailboat can be divided into hull, mast, and sails. Social Science is made up of history, economics, sociology, geography, and psychology. The government of the United States has three main branches: the executive, legislative, and judicial.

CLASSIFICATION

Strategy

The need for care in setting up classifications can be demonstrated by examples of the two kinds of classification used in analysis. The kinds are called simple and complex classifications.

Simple classification

This form of classification usually involves grouping your subject into two categories. For example, if your purpose is to investigate your experiences with good male teachers, a simple classification merely involves separating the subject “teachers” into good teachers and those who were not considered good (level one of classification). Step two would be to take the good teachers classification and organize it again (level two) into two classes—male and female. If your purpose is to determine how many good male teachers you have had in your academic experience, you pursue only the male classification and abandon the female portion. We call this

a simple classification because at each stage or level the analysis primarily consists simply of two opposites to establish two sub-groups.

Complex classification

You most likely will decide to select the complex classification for your composition assignments because this method demands that you delve more deeply into the multiple categories / levels required by your instructor. For instance, if you are expected to consider the full range of your experience with weight lifters in health clubs, you would choose the complex classification method, beginning with level one. You could, therefore, classify the types of weight lifters one most likely would encounter in health clubs—the annoying socializers, the serious competitive athletes, and the predatory lifters. Next, if you have chosen the annoying socializers as your focus, you would further classify that group (level two)—the “show off,” the “know-it-all,” and the “wanderer.” Although this level does not exhaust the types of weight lifters you have experienced, it does include those specific types you wish to discuss in your present analysis (focus). Notice that your analysis in a complex classification is of a much narrower, deeper, more interesting, imaginative, and complex nature than a simple classification.

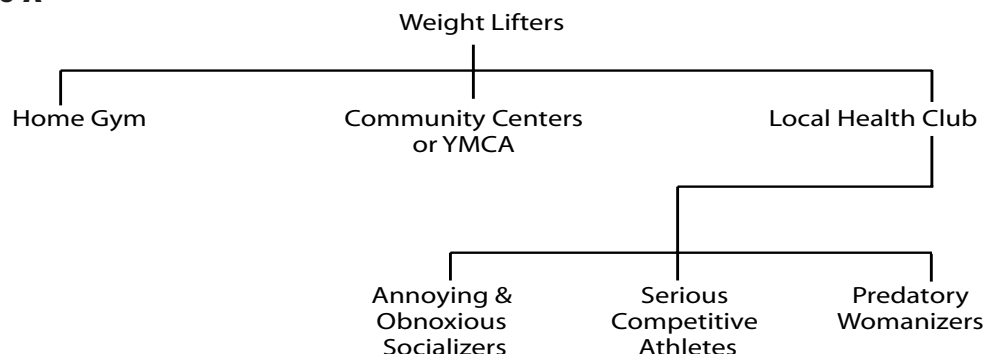
Organization

When writing a classification essay, make sure you adhere to the following:

1. You must set up a clear basis for the classification, and you must follow the classification through logically and thoroughly. This means you must be careful to classify your subject distinctly at each level of the analysis. To say that there are three types of bad teachers—the boring, the incomprehensible, and those who drive pickup trucks—is using an indistinct method of classification. Then make certain you discuss each category in relation to those elements that link the category to the other categories of the same class, in this case, their methods of instruction. This basis of comparison is used similarly in your comparison and contrast; it is essential in classification as well to make your purpose clear to your audience in examining your categories by classifying them.
2. You should develop your analysis by classification as completely as is necessary for your purpose. Your purpose determines how complete and extensive the classification will be. Your analysis will always be based on some specific interest in the subject being analyzed, and that specific interest must be clearly stated to your reader in the thesis.

The following diagram illustrates the process of complex classification:

FIGURE 9-A



Classification and Division

You should develop your classification as completely as is necessary for your purpose in the analysis. Your thesis and your discussion, then, will include only those types with whom you are personally familiar although there exist other categories of weight lifters. Just make certain that your reader understands that your classification is limited by your focus / purpose.

DIVISION

Having studied one part of the process of analysis, classification, let us now look at its partner, division. *Division* is a way of analyzing a subject, too. But instead of sorting the subject matter into categories as we do in classification, we divide a single subject into its component parts. When we say that *Hamlet* has five acts or that a certain book has fifteen chapters, we are dividing *Hamlet* and the book into parts. When a sports-car lover talks of the engine, transmission, and body of a new Ferrari, he is talking about parts of the whole.

Strategy

The same rules that apply to a successful analysis by classification apply to division as well. First, a clear basis for the division must be established. If we divide water into its chemical elements, we divide it into hydrogen and oxygen. We do not say that water is composed of hydrogen, oxygen, and the ability to freeze at 0 degrees Centigrade; since we are only interested in the chemical makeup of water, this third attribute is irrelevant to our division. Every division, just like every classification, is made on the basis of some particular interest in the subject, and the division must confine itself to the parts of the subject that relate to that interest.

Also, as in classification, you must continue your analysis by division logically and completely until it is finished. (You cannot discuss only four acts of *Hamlet*, for example.) If you plan to divide a subject only into its main parts or focus on particular parts, you must make this limitation clear to your audience. This focus should appear in your introductory paragraph, preferably in your thesis statement. Otherwise, your readers have the right to expect a complete division. If you tell them that you are going to discuss the organization of the police force and talk only about the Narcotics Squad and the Police Laboratory, they will wonder what happened to the Vice Squad, the Traffic Bureau, and the Homicide Division. If you want to discuss only two of the parts of the police force, then you must say something like “The control and suppression of narcotics traffic are the responsibility of two allied parts of the police force, the Narcotics Squad and the Police Laboratory, whose operation and organization are important parts of one aspect of the police force.” Here you have made clear to your audience your intention to discuss only two of the parts that make up the police force, and your audience will not expect to read about the Homicide Division or the Vice Squad.

Organization

The following skeletal outline is an example of division. As you read it, notice what the subject is that is being divided, into what parts it is being divided, and how the division is structured.

HAMILTONIAN AMERICA

Thesis: Unlike Jefferson’s democratic governmental theories, Hamilton’s picture of the future of America was based on three main ideas—centralized government, aristocratic rule, and progress through industrialization.

- I. Hamilton believed in a strong, centralized government, not in the decentralized regionally-oriented government of Jefferson.
- II. While Jefferson believed in the common man's right to democratic process, Hamilton felt that the aristocratic, well-educated minority was better equipped to govern.
- III. Finally, Hamilton based the two preceding principles on his vision of America as a strong industrial country with an emphasis on progress and technology.

The subject of analysis is Alexander Hamilton's political theory. This rather scant outline divides his philosophy into three main ideas or parts. Hamilton had other ideas (he believed, for example, in a pro-British foreign policy), but the writer is specifically interested only in "three main ideas," which he tells his readers in his thesis statement. Not only does the writer's thesis state the specific ideas to be discussed in the division process, it also provides a clear notion of what specific point the writer wishes to make about those three parts, that they differed from Jefferson's ideas.

It is worth noting, too, that the intended essay will not be developed by division alone. Although the writer's chief subject is Alexander Hamilton's political philosophy, he finds it impossible to discuss Hamilton's ideas without reference to Hamilton's great opponent, Thomas Jefferson. The essay, then, also employs comparison and contrast; the writer should observe the guidelines for comparison and contrast by following the rule of consistency in comparison throughout the essay. However, division remains the writer's main method of organization and development. It is not unusual to find several different modes of expository prose being used in a single essay.

CHECKLIST FOR DIVISION ESSAY

Be sure that the division

1. is applied to a singular subject. Only one thing at a time can be divided.
2. is consistent with your purpose.
3. is complete in fulfilling your purpose.
4. is clearly stated in your thesis statement and that your point is appropriate for your audience.
5. uses logical subdivisions to make the point and arranges them in a logical or emphatic order.
6. Did you edit your paper carefully, checking for major grammatical and spelling errors?