

Point Order Lesson

for Middle School and High School Students

Welcome to a lesson on point orders!

Every essay and report needs points, and all points should be in an effective and logical order.

What you are about to read is part one of a lesson on point orders found in chapter 2 of *The Power in Your Hands: Writing Nonfiction in High School, 2nd Edition* by Sharon Watson.

Here are the three point orders in this lesson:

1. Inverted Triangle
2. Psychological Order
3. Climactic Order

Help! I have all these great points but don't know how to arrange them

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Your Toolbox: Point Orders

Every profession needs tools. Even writing.

When you brainstorm, you write ideas as they come to you. That's good. That's how to brainstorm. When it comes to planning the paragraphs, however, you will put your ideas in a rational order, with each reason getting at least one paragraph. Now you need viable **point orders**.

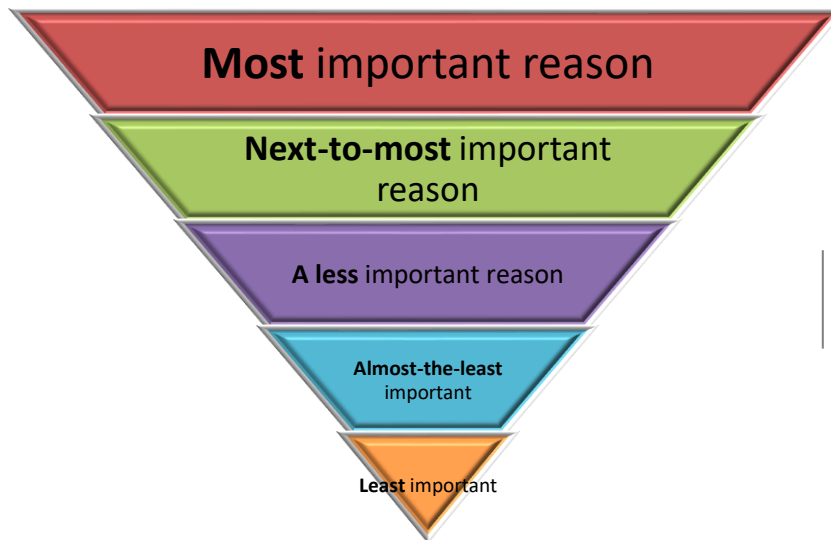
A family of three orders is in this lesson.



The first point order is a family or cluster of orders and is often called the **order of importance** or **emphatic order** (“emphatic” because the points are arranged according to their strength or emphasis). In this section, the words *strength*, *urgency*, *importance*, and *compelling* mean the same thing.

Inverted Triangle

A popular way to arrange points based on their importance or strength is this one:



Point Orders

- Importance or emphatic orders:
- Inverted triangle
 - Psychological order
 - Climactic order

This example has five reasons. Your number of reasons may vary, but the line-up—from **most** compelling to **least** compelling—will remain the same when you use this order.

It would be easy to think that because you are writing a “least important” reason it can be wimpy, like overcooked broccoli. Not so. All of your reasons should be sparkling, brilliant, and awe inspiring.

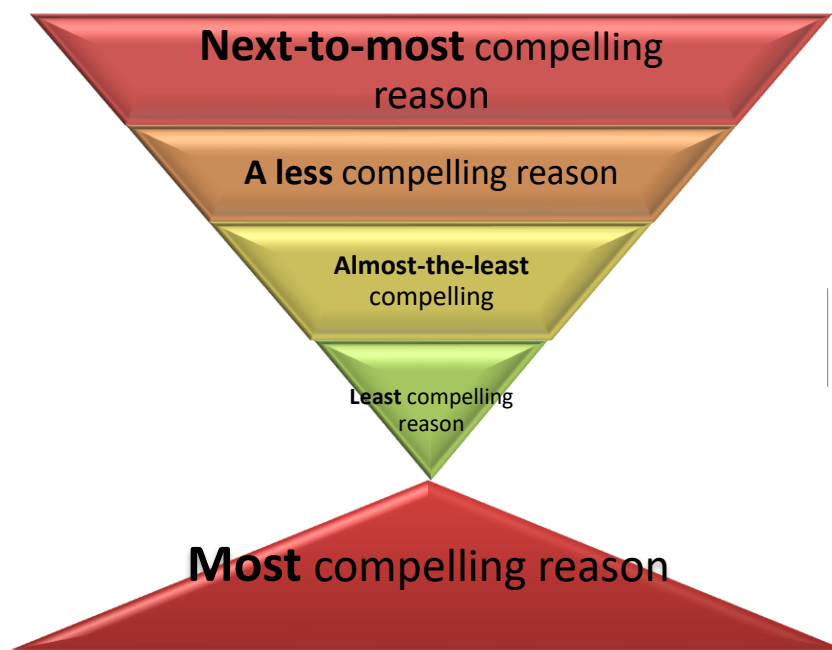
Reporters typically use the above method (and they call it the *inverted triangle*) for two reasons: (1) they need to capture their readers’ attention quickly, and (2) they are not in control of their article’s final length. The editor can lop off the end of the article, depending

on how much space is available on the newspaper page or online site. So the reporter puts the most important information in the beginning of the article and arranges all the other points in descending order of importance. This order will come in handy for some of your own essays or papers, too.

How do you know which points are the most important? Sometimes it will be obvious; their strength will leap out at you. Other times you will decide which ones are the most compelling reasons based on your audience. If you're writing to children about the dangers of drinking too much sugary soda, your point about potential kidney problems will be in the "least compelling" category because children have difficulty grasping the idea of themselves in the future.

Psychological Order

Here's another pattern that belongs in the importance family (shaped like a strange hourglass):



Point Orders

Importance or emphatic orders:

- Inverted triangle
- Psychological order
- Climactic order

This **psychological order** takes into account that people often read the first and last reasons and only skim the middle ones.

This order is much like a band or choir concert. It begins with the second-best song the band or choir performs so the audience is wowed by the performers' expertise. At the end, the program delivers the best song, leaving no doubt of the band or choir's superior musical talent. Many professional writers sift through their facts and anecdotes to find one that has the most impact, and they save that for the last point, giving the biggest bang at the end. Readers are left with an indelible image.

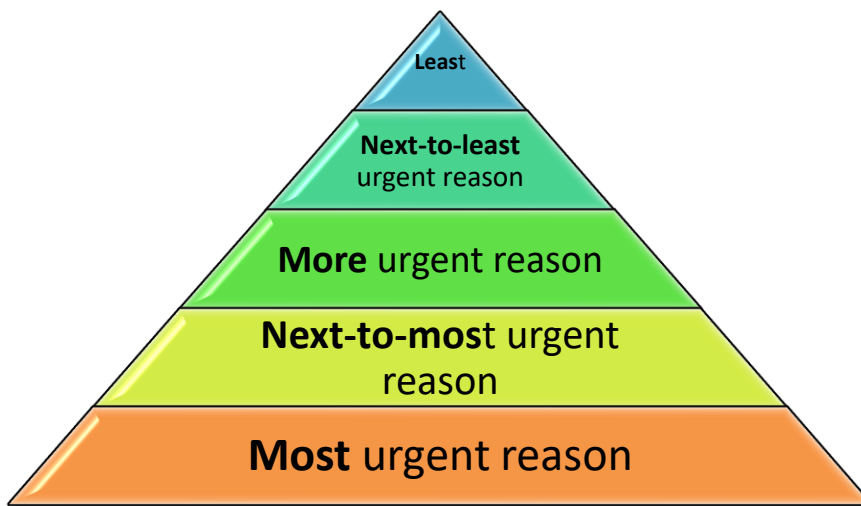
When you write the last and most important point in your essay using the psychological order, include a key phrase that will alert readers of its importance:

- ✓ But most important . . .
- ✓ Of greatest consequence . . .
- ✓ But nothing beats . . .
- ✓ Ultimately . . .
- ✓ It is of the utmost importance . . .

Avoid using the psychological order if you have only three reasons; it feels as if the middle drops out of the article, and your strongest reason will be diluted. Use it with four or more reasons or points.

Climactic Order

Another pattern belongs in this order-of-importance family. It's called the **climactic order**:



Point Orders

- Importance or emphatic orders:
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The climactic order builds from weakest to strongest, “weakest” being a relative term. The key phrases used in the psychological order work well in this one, too, as you work through to your most important reason.

Two other methods of arranging your points are worthy of mention here:

- ✓ Simplest to most complex
- ✓ Most familiar to least familiar

Choosing an appropriate order for your points makes the information easier to understand and assimilate. No reader wants to feel dizzy and confused, as though bouncing around in a pinball machine.

Now it's your turn

Below are an opinion and four points to support it. Put numbers next to each point to indicate **most** important (1) to **least** important (4). Then decide which importance order will be most effective for this topic and write it below the points. Don't worry about if you agree with the opinion or disagree. Focus on the reasons and the point order.

Opinion: Cell phone usage while driving needs government regulation.

Reasons:

- Distracted drivers cause many accidents.
- Distractions such as talking on a cell phone or texting while driving cause drivers to miss turns or exits or make poor driving decisions.
- Accident fatalities involving cell phone usage are increasing.
- Many drivers are already multitasking. Cell phone usage puts this trend over the top.

Point order you chose:

Explain why you chose that point order:

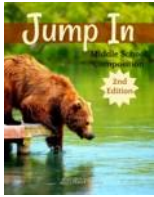
End of lesson

Answer to **Now it's your turn**

The least important reason could be either the point about multi-tasking or the one about making poor driving decisions due to distractions. The most important point is the one about fatalities. The most effective order for this set of points is the climactic order or the psychological order because either one of those will put the fatalities last (as the most important point) to emphasize it.

Other point orders covered in [*The Power in Your Hands: Writing Nonfiction in High School*](#) are chronological, spatial, effect-size, specific-to-general, and general-to-specific

If you and your student liked this lesson but would like a full writing curriculum for middle school or high school students, consider these options from Writing with Sharon Watson:



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