Tip Sheet 12. Patterns of Development in Technical Writing

Patterns	Characteristics				
	Definition of Pattern	**Writer's Purpose**	**Aim for Reader**	**Types**	**Guidelines**
Analyses	To critically examine a whole or the parts in relation to the whole	To organize information in small units for the reader	To understand easily and relate parts	See below.	Organize into units that are logical and best relate the whole.
Classification	To arrange information into groups that share common features	To dissect information; to create groups, to eliminate overlapping points	To grasp order; to grasp a common feature; to relate information	Descriptive: formal (grouped by factual or sensory characteristics; informal (grouped by personal judgment)	Adapt to user and purpose: for formal, use 1 principle at a time; for informal, use parallel groups at the same levels and avoid overlap.
Partition	Divide a subject into major components then each major into minor parts. A kind of classification.	To describe an object or subject; to arrange descriptions; to create rigorous groups and subgroups; to create a point of view for the reader.	To grasp main and subparts of an object or subject; to perceive order in a description; to understand relations and distinctions.	Descriptive	Adapt to user and purpose: use one basis for partitioning at a time; be systematic (top down, inside out, most or least important…).
Segmentation	Divide and order by time the elements that describe a process.	To direct; to instruct; to inform; to explain.	To perform a task; to learn a process; to understand a procedure.	Descriptive	Adapt to user and purpose: make smallest groupings of a manageable size and clarify relationships.
Comparison	Select criteria from among known facts and use these criteria to judge the facts as alike or different.	To show similarities or differences to reveal strengths and weaknesses; to help readers make a choice of action.; to persuade.	To understand differences and similarities; to decide; to understand by means of analogy.	Descriptive Implicitly persuasive	Adapt to user and purpose: arrange complex comparisons hierarchically; arrange groups in a helpful order, criteria mentioned first.
Cause & Effect	Describe how one action will lead to another action, thereby ordering parts of a process by their connects.	To create a descriptive chain of events to show how they are related; to describe consequences; to persuade.	To understand how a cause produces an effect; to understand a process or a procedure; to perceive consequences; to choose a course of action.	Descriptive Directly persuasive	Adapt to user and purpose; define causes and effects before relating them; carefully explain the links and hierarchy relating the cause to the effect.
Problem & Solution	Describe how a need, in a certain context, was or could be met.	To describe a situation and its resolution.	To understand how a problem was or could be solved.	Descriptive Directly persuasive	Adapt to user and purpose; identify situation, links, and what logically needs to be done to resolve the problem. Relate the hierarchy of causes and effects.
Definition	To distinctly specify the boundaries of a term or concept	To clarify words and concepts	To understand details and meaning	Informal, or formal; sentence or expanded	Use concise words that do not repeat the term being defined.
Description	To give an account that reveals the appearance or nature of an object	To create an accurate picture of an object in words or in a visual	To form a correct mental image or impression of an object	Entire object Functional parts of object	Define; state purpose and function; list characteristics of size, shape, components.
Process explanation	To outline steps in an event or to explain how things happen	To help readers understand how events occur	To explain a process without giving instructions to do it	Over all process in which successive steps explained	Use a narrative form rather than a list of numbered steps or bullets.
Instructions	To enumerate exact steps to accomplish an action	To aid the reader to accomplish a task	To follow the steps and accomplish the stated task	Numbered or sequential steps	Include essential steps, include safety warnings —high risk, medium risk, low risk —in the order of execution. Use short, simple imperative sentences (start with verb) and impersonal tone. Have someone who did not write them test steps.

Important to note:

1. Use patterns only as guides: adapt them to the purpose of your message, readers, and situation. These patterns are also known as forms of argument.

2. A variety of patterns can be used within a single document.

3. Patterns are best used in this sequence: announce the topic; present generalizations before details, reveal organization through forecasting statements, transitions, headings, or visuals; move from most important to least important points.

Adapted from: Sherman, Theodore A., and Simon S. Johnson. 1990. *Modern technical writing*, 5th ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: prentice Hall. Chapter 6.

And from: Anderson, Paul. 1991. *Technical writing: A reader-centered approach*, 2nd ed. NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers. Chapter 8.