**Essay Format: Classification**

**What is Classification?**

College assignments often depend on the ability to classify. Examinations and reports in such wide-ranging assignments as government, literature, and science require you to classify before answering. For example, you may be asked to do something like the following: "Explain the results of the French Revolution." (You could classify the results as economic, political, social, etc.) Unless classifying is done, there is a tendency to write every detail at once in an unrelated fashion.

To classify is to gather into categories, segments, methods, types, or kinds according to a single basic principle of division. A writer takes a subject like the kinds of politicians, divides it into related sub-topics, and discusses each one individually. Classification is a common activity that is especially helpful in organizing large groups of ideas into smaller, recognizable divisions that can be given distinct names or titles and then described in detail.

Classification can lead to excellent humorous papers. Members of a bad football team could be classified as Hopeless Bums, Hopeless Mediocrities, and Hopeless Physical Wrecks. Household chores could be classified as Chores I Can Put Off for a Week, Chores I Can Put Off for a Month, and Chores I Can Put Off Forever. A student once classified instructors as Fascist Pigs, Middle-of-the-Road Sheep, and Mad Dog Fanatics.

**Writing the Paper**

**Select a limited or restricted subject.**

In cases when you face the prospect of an endless number of classes, it's generally better to revise the subject, making it much more narrow, than to add a catch-all class like "miscellaneous" or "others." A paper classifying religions, for example, could go on forever, whereas a paper classifying religions practiced most frequently by PJC students would have a simpler task.

**Choose a principle or basis for making the classification.**

For example, items on a shopping list may be classified on the basis of importance: items that are absolutely necessary, items that would be helpful, and items that are luxuries. A wise shopper would begin with those items in the first category and buy those in the last only if his money held out. Of course, another shopper may divide the list according to food, household goods, and gifts. How a thing is divided into classes depends, therefore, on who does the dividing and what the division is for. Nonetheless, to be clear and consistent, a classification should be made according to a single principle. Oonce you have selected a criterion for making your division, you can concentrate exclusively on developing the categories that are thereby yielded. **Use only one principle**. Different classifications can apply at different times to the same subject, but it is essential that you use only one at a time. Cars, for instance, can be classified by size. They can also be classified by manufacturer, price, body style, and so on. Choose the one principle of classification suitable to your purpose. Something is obviously illogical in this arrangement of cars: compact, intermediate, Fords, full-size. Also, you should not, halfway through, switch to another principle that is likely to spawn further categories. For example, if you were writing an essay classifying cars according to their body types and suddenly switched to a classification based on number of cylinders, overlapping categories would result. The effect would be a tiresome double count.

**Divide the subject into three or four distinct groups.**

Suppose you were going to write a paper that classified the ways people answer the telephone. Your plan might be as follows: the rude way (specific example), the sexy way (specific examples), and the business-like way (specific examples).

**Arrange these groups in some kind of order.**

There is no set rule about which category to present first, second, or last in a classification paragraph; however, some kind of logical sequence should be followed: from the most to the least important category, from the least to the most important (climactic order), or from the smallest to the largest, and so on. Use appropriate transitions to emphasize the order of arrangement of details and to show the relationships among the classes or divisions as you move from a description or illustration of one to a description of the next. Using transitions will also make each category separate from the others; because if the segments overlap, the details are fuzzy.

**Develop the classes as equally and completely as possible.**

Write approximately the same amount for each class. Give equal importance to each segment of the classification. Balance plays an important role in a classification theme. You must curb the tendency to pamper one segment with elaborate details and the other with a few barren lines. Once you have begun, be sure that you discuss the whole pie--the entire subject. Don't leave a missing piece. For each, describe specifically enough to show how it is distinct from the others. Use as many specific examples for each as you need to make the class distinct. All individual aspects of your subject should be able to fit into one of the classes you've devised. Classifying politicians as only good or bad doesn't take care of the many who are neither all one nor all the other; you need another category.

**The Writing Assignment**

Choose a subject from the list below and develop it into a well-organized theme:

* Classify men that women should avoid or vice versa.
* Classify friends, bores, lovers, smokers, politicians, dancers, bosses, employers, students, instructors, drunks, automobile drivers, pinochle or bridge or bingo players, shoppers, cheats, patients in a hospital, athletes, bartenders, clerks, cooks, dates, gamblers, ministers, movie fans, musicians, salespeople, shoppers, waiters, enemies.
* Classify hitchhiking methods, problems facing college students, ways of sitting in class or sleeping in class, handshakes, cheats, laughter, lies.

Below are some sample topic sentences:

* I am interested in several kinds of work opportunities.
* Television shows may be classified into five types.
* My present life is divided into four aspects.
* My friends (enemies) may be grouped into three major types.
* Several steps led to former President Nixon's resignation from the White House during the Watergate scandal.
* Literature is classified into four different forms: short story, novel, drama, and poetry.
* So far in life, I have experienced three kinds of love: parental devotion, deep friendship, and romantic attraction.
* The people I know may be classified into mere acquaintances, casual friends, bosom buddies, and loved ones.
* The people I know fall into four different political groups: radical, liberal, conservative, and indifferent.
* The people in my life are classifiable into three distinct classes, each with its own peculiar way of behaving: lower class, middle class, and snooty.
* My friends, relatives, and acquaintances fall neatly into three groups: the were-fats, the are-fats, and the will-be-fats.

Additional Suggestions

* Classify students according to their year in college or their membership or nonmembership in campus organizations.
* Classify all the dates you have ever had into three or four groups. Use descriptive details in naming and clarifying each group.
* Classify people's looks according to three or four general types, and supply vivid examples of each type.
* Find a basis for classifying all single-dwelling houses. Name the categories and supply a description of each.
* From your experience, how many major kinds of entertainment are there? Who indulges in each? Write an essay answering these questions.
* Find a basis for classifying all the wars America has fought. Then write a one-paragraph theme supplying examples of each type of war.

Classify these topics

* the types of drinkers: alcoholics, social drinkers, teetotalers;
* college students: those who want an education, those who want a job, those who want a diploma;
* crime and detection television programs: criminal-centered, police-centered, private-detective centered;
* churchgoers: the devout, the insincere, the socialites; and
* political extremists: the ultraconservatives, the ultraliberals, the know-nothings.