

UDI Product: A Strategy for Organizing Ideas through Color-Coding

Developed by

James M. Gentile and Donna McCormac-Condon

Manchester Community College

Manchester, Connecticut

Description

This product assists students in the organization of their writing through color-coding lines of text. It has applications to the prewriting, writing, and rewriting process and can be adapted to additional academic situations (reading, note-taking, etc.). The product consists of instructor guidelines and samples (for classroom illustration and instruction).

Strategy

This product is predicated on the student's basic understanding of essay and paragraph form. That understanding is applied to the student's own writing through a strategy which allows the student to visualize the form of his or her writing. The strategy is useful for all students who wish to check how well they've organized their writing, and especially for those who have difficulty organizing their ideas.

The procedure for introducing and applying the strategy is described below. Doing so in class establishes a community of learners. This sense of community is reinforced through opportunities for collaborative review of the strategy and/or eventual application of the strategy in peer-editing sessions. (Principle 8)

- ❑ **Instructor reviews essay form (or a form appropriate to a particular discipline).** The student must have a clear understanding of the basic components of an essay—introduction, body, and conclusion. The student must also have an understanding that each supporting point for the controlling idea of an essay is developed in a chunk (a paragraph or group of paragraphs) in the body of the essay. This review accommodates varying degrees of past knowledge and experience.

This review of “essay form” itself may not necessarily be relevant to all writing situations the student will encounter. Each instructor should review with the student writing situations applicable to the instructor's discipline. For example, a science instructor might introduce this organizational strategy into the curriculum, but would do so through the context of a lab report. Or, a journalism instructor might introduce this strategy through the context of an article.

- ❑ **Instructor introduces theory of color-coding to student writing.** Using a student model, the instructor demonstrates the strategy of color-coding. To meet diverse student needs, learning styles, and sensory abilities (Principle 4), the instructor distributes a sample of the essay to the students, projects it on the overhead projector, and reads the essay to the students. The instructor then

demonstrates the strategy in a “simple and intuitive way” (Principle 3), as shown below.

1. Together, the class identifies the controlling idea of the essay and the supporting points made. The instructor writes on a transparency the controlling idea and lists the supporting points. Each point is written in a different colored marker.
 2. Students return to their handout of the essay and either independently or collaboratively go through it and underline only the sentences which match the first supporting idea in the list, using the appropriately colored marker or colored pen/pencil. Once they have identified all the relevant sentences for that idea, they move on to the next idea, using a color matching that already identified on the list. They proceed until they have covered the entire list of supporting ideas.
 3. Students review the marked essay. They determine whether the writer has explored supporting points in separate chunks of the essay—ie. has presented these points effectively in a single chunk of color—or whether the writer has repeated supporting points throughout the essay—ie. has mingled points in chunks which are multi-colored.
 4. The instructor should introduce ways to revise the essay based on knowledge acquired through color-coding. As in the model used, if multiple ideas are developed in single chunks, students must ask:
 - Should this idea be linked to a same-colored idea in another chunk or paragraph?
 - Should this idea be presented in a separate chunk or paragraph?
 - Should this idea be cut altogether?
- **The student applies the color-coding strategy to his or her own work.** Through classroom review and application of the strategy, students acquire understanding of the concept that each supporting point must be developed separately and realize that distinguishing the points by color can verify such development.

Applications to Writing

Students will approach writing a draft in various ways—from elaborate preplanning (generating ideas, outlining, etc.) to cold writing. The principle behind the strategy is adaptable to these various stages in the writing process—particularly prewriting and rewriting.

Applications to the Prewriting Process

Students might use the strategy several ways when prewriting. Since one of the objectives of prewriting is to generate as much material as possible, instructors usually encourage students to record all of their ideas without consideration of their eventual usefulness. Once these ideas are recorded, students must sort them out and then evaluate them. The color-coding strategy is a useful way to sort out ideas.

Two prominent prewriting strategies are **freewriting**—continuous writing in sentence form about a topic—and **brainstorming**—listing all ideas about a topic.

If the student **freewrites**, he or she can apply the color coding strategy to identify ideas and then prepare for the drafting process.

1. The student should review the freewriting, identify the supporting points generated, and then color code each unique point (as described above). (In a short piece of freewriting, the student might not need to prelist the supporting ideas but instead directly color them. If so, step 2 will be unnecessary.) When the student comes to an idea already made, he or she should color it to match the earlier point. When the student comes to an idea unrelated to the subject (which frequently occurs during freewriting since the student is encouraged to record any and all thoughts so as to “free” the writing process), he or she should leave it unmarked.
2. The student should list all ideas generated, again coloring them.
3. The student should then organize the ideas, using spatial, chronological, categorical, or progressive order, as appropriate. If the student selects an emphatic pattern, repeated colored points or large areas of the same color might signal an important idea.
4. The student now has an organizational plan and can begin writing the draft. This plan can be returned to later in order to review and revise the completed draft.

See example of color-coding a short piece of freewriting. Note During the prewriting process, students use different colored highlighters or pens. Due to technology limitations, this example is color-coded using computer generated colored lettering.*

If the student **brainstorms**, he or she can apply the color-coding strategy to identify the main ideas.

The student should review the list of brainstormed ideas and color each unique idea. When the student comes to an idea earlier listed, he or she should color it to match the earlier idea. This color coding process will allow the student to identify main ideas, group related ideas, and eliminate repeated ideas.

See example of color-coding a brainstormed list of ideas. Note During brainstorming process, students use different colored highlighters or pens. Due to technology limitations, this example is color-coded using computer generated colored lettering.*

Applications to the Drafting Process

The student applies the four steps identified under **Strategy** to his or her own writing. Once this color coding is completed, students are left with a color “picture” which shows them how well they’ve organized their writing.

If the color-coded draft reveals that the student has not presented or developed single points in separate chunks of the draft, he or she must begin to rearrange the points into chunks where sentences of the same color can be placed together.

If the color-coded draft reveals that the student has presented and developed single points in separate chunks of the draft, he or she should proceed to other aspects of revision.

See example of color-coding a completed draft.

Sample Prewriting on the Topic “Ways to Improve Education”

Below are two responses to the topic characteristic of those typically generated in a classroom.

Freewriting

In order to improve education, I think learning should be fun. Teachers should choose subjects that will interest kids in the class. Also, teachers should teach in interesting ways. I think group projects are a great way to learn. I learn so much more when I study with my classmates or when I have to do a project with my classmates. I do not think teachers should just stand up there and lecture. Learning should be fun. I remember my European History teacher in high school just stood up there and lectured. In contrast, my American History teacher used group projects like doing research on local historical places. School systems can also improve education by having budgets to hire enough teachers and buy updated books. Teachers must be interested in teaching. Learning should not be boring but fun. Students must want to learn and come prepared to work hard in class.

1. Review the freewriting and color-code the main ideas

In order to improve education, I think learning should be fun. Teachers should choose subjects that will interest kids in the class. Also, teachers should teach in interesting ways. I think group projects are a great way to learn. I learn so much more when I study with my classmates or when I have to do a project with my classmates. I do not think teachers should just stand up there and lecture. Learning should be fun. I remember my European History teacher in high school just stood up there and lectured. In contrast, my American History teacher used group projects like doing research on local historical places. School systems can also improve education by having budgets to hire enough teachers and buy updated books. Teachers must be interested in teaching. Learning should not be

boring but fun. Students must want to learn and come prepared to work hard in class.

2. List the main ideas and color-code them

This student recognizes that some of the ideas are repeated and that some of the sentences illustrate the ideas. He reduces his writing to the following ideas:

Learning should be fun

Teachers should choose subjects to interest kids

Teachers should teach in interesting ways

Teachers should use group projects

School systems should have budgets to hire enough teachers and buy updated books

Teachers must be interested in teaching

Students must be prepared to work hard

3. Organize the main ideas

This student recognizes that he can organize his ideas categorically: he has listed things teachers can do, school systems can do, and students can do. Looking at his color-coded freewriting and then his list of ideas, he realizes that most of his information focuses on teachers. He thus decides to organize the categories progressively, building toward teachers. After more thought, he develops the following outline.

- I. School System Budget
 - A. Hire enough teachers
 - B. Purchase updated text books
- II. Students
 - A. Come prepared
- III. Teachers
 - A. Make learning fun
 - B. Choose subjects that interest students
 - C. Teach in interesting ways
 - D. Use group projects
 - E. Be interested in teaching

As the student writes his draft, he will color code to help structure his writing.

Brainstorming

Choose topics that will interest students
Have collaborative learning opportunities
Allow students to ask questions
Do group work
Reward students who do well
Have students do research using new technology
Make learning fun
Use grades to motivate students
Choose subjects students will want to study

1. Review the list and color-code the main ideas

Choose topics that will interest students

Have collaborative learning opportunities

Allow students to ask questions

Reward student who do well

Have students do research using new technology

Make learning fun

Use grades to motivate students

Choose subjects students will want to study

2. Rewrite the list to avoid repetition

Choose topics that will interest students

Have collaborative learning opportunities

Allow students to ask questions

Reward students who do well

Have students do research using new technology

Make learning fun

Use grades to motivate students

2. Organize the list

This student has generated many useful ideas, all focusing on things teachers can do. She might decide to refer briefly to several ideas and then focus on two or three. The repetition of the first two points (evidenced by the repeated color-coding) suggests that these might be main ideas to focus on.

Sample Draft of a Student Essay

My Brother (Original)

My parents always expected my brother to work to earn money. We didn't have stuff handed to us. My brother Jason has always had a job and now has a great job as a manager at the Filenes Department store which he's been doing for five years now. He will be getting married in the summer to his girlfriend who he met in high school. Jason also has his own apartment in Mansfield just twenty minutes from the University of Connecticut where he went to college. Out of my whole family my older brother has influenced me the most. He is the most important person in my life.

In his younger days Jason played a lot of sports. In high school he played football, basketball, and lacrosse. I never really was interested in sports until I was about eight years old and saw my brother play basketball. I got more involved in sports by watching him. He spent most of his time with his girlfriend and the people he played sports with. My parents really gave Jason a lot of responsibility. They also made sure he got a good education. When he was just eighteen he got his first car which was our dad's sports car. Then he traded it in after six years for his new car a Honda Civic.

Jason is one of the managers at the Filenes Department store at the Buckland mall in Manchester. He's been doing that for five years now. His job responsibility is pretty tough, but to me he has become an expert at it. He helps out in every department when one of his employees calls for his assistance. Most of the time he works late and always calls his fiancée to let her know that he has to work late. When Jason started working at Filenes he was a sales associate at first then got promoted to the management position. He works well with distractions and is always on time to his job.

Jason is 6'1" tall and works out a lot at the local gym in his free time. He also likes shopping with his girlfriend. He and his girlfriend rarely get into arguments. Jason was popular in high school and college. He played a lot of sports in high school and college. He went to the University of Connecticut. He majored in Business Administration.

Jason is a cool down to earth older brother to me. He never drinks or smokes cigarettes. A few years ago when he and I were driving down the highway his car got a flat tire. It only took him about half an hour to put the spare tire on. He is good at working on cars because he always

watched our dad when he was working on cars in the garage. He is also good at working on computers and repairing electronics. I always saw Jason as my role model because when I was about eleven years old he showed me how to impress a girl that I liked in junior high school. He never would show disrespect to our parents, his friends, his fiancée or me.

Of all the people I know Jason has influenced me the most. He has always had compassion towards everyone he knows. I am thankful that I am a lot more responsible because of my brother. He is a fun person to be with and spent time with me especially when I didn't have anyone to hang out with when I was younger. Someday Jason will be a great father. I will always remember all the fun times we had together hanging out and doing what we do best, having fun.

The freewriting and brainstorming models presented earlier illustrate the use of colored markers or pens (depending on the number of points identifies an thus the number of colors needed, highlighters might also have been used). Another option - one which especially accommodates the student who cannot hold markers - is a computer and printer with color capability. This draft model is prepared using this method so as to illustrate this option. (This product also includes an example which uses a computer without such capabilities.)

1. Read through draft and identify controlling idea and supporting ideas
2. Assign a color to each supporting idea

Controlling Idea for "My Brother"

Throughout my life, my older brother Jason has been my role model.

Supporting Ideas

1. Responsible
2. Athletic
3. Health Lifestyle
4. Educated
5. Respectful

3. Reread draft and color-code sentence which matches a specific supporting idea.

My Brother (Color-Coded)

My parents always expected my brother to work to earn money. We didn't have stuff handed to us. My brother Jason has always had a job and now has a great job as a manager at the Filenes Department store which he's been doing for five years now. He will be getting married in the summer to his girlfriend who he met in high school. Jason also has his own apartment in Mansfield just twenty minutes from the University of Connecticut where he went to college. Out of my whole family my older brother has influenced me the most. He is the most important person in my life.

In his younger days Jason played a lot of sports. In high school he played football, basketball, and lacrosse. I never really was interested in sports until I was about eight years old and saw my brother play basketball. I got more involved in sports by watching him. He spent most of his time with his girlfriend and the people he played sports with. My parents really gave Jason a lot of responsibility. They also made sure he got a good education. When he was just eighteen he got his first car which was our dad's sports car. Then he traded it in after six years for his new car a Honda Civic.

Jason is one of the managers at the Filenes Department store at the Buckland mall in Manchester. He's been doing that for five years now. His job responsibility is pretty tough, but to me he has become an expert at it. He helps out in every department when one of his employees calls for his assistance. Most of the time he works late and always calls his fiancée to let her know that he has to work late. When Jason started working at Filenes he was a sales associate at first then got promoted to the management position. He works well with distractions and is always on time to his job.

Jason is 6'1" tall and works out a lot at the local gym in his free time. He also likes shopping with his girlfriend. He and his girlfriend rarely get into arguments. Jason was popular in high school and college. He played a lot of sports in high school and college. He went to the University of Connecticut. He majored in Business Administration.

Jason is a cool down to earth older brother to me. He never drinks or smokes cigarettes. A few years ago when he and I were driving down the highway his car got a flat tire. It only took him about half an hour to put the spare tire on. He is good at working on cars because he always watched our dad when he was working on cars in the garage. He is also good at working on

computers and repairing electronics. I always saw Jason as my role model because when I was about eleven years old he showed me how to impress a girl that I liked in junior high school. He never would show disrespect to our parents, his friends, his fiancée or me.

Of all the people I know Jason has influenced me the most. He has always had compassion towards everyone he knows. I am thankful that I am a lot more responsible because of my brother. He is a fun person to be with and spent time with me especially when I didn't have anyone to hang out with when I was younger. Someday Jason will be a great father. I will always remember all the fun times we had together hanging out and doing what we do best, having fun.

4. Rewrite draft so that each supporting idea is presented in a separate chunk (paragraph or paragraphs)

My Brother (Revised)

My parents always expected my brother to work to earn money. We didn't have stuff handed to us. My brother Jason has always had a job and now has a great job as a manager at the Filenes Department store which he's been doing for five years now. He will be getting married in the summer to his girlfriend who he met in high school. Jason also has his own apartment in Mansfield just twenty minutes from the University of Connecticut where he went to college. Out of my whole family my older brother has influenced me the most. He is the most important person in my life.

I am thankful that I am a lot more responsible because of my brother. My parents really gave Jason a lot of responsibility. When he was just eighteen he got his first car which was our dad's sports car. Then he traded it in after six years for his new car a Honda Civic. Jason has always had a job too. Currently, he is one of the managers at the Filenes Department store at the Buckland mall in Manchester. He's been doing that for five years now. His job responsibility is pretty tough, but to me he has become an expert at it. He helps out in every department when one of his employees calls for his assistance. Most of the time he works late and always calls his fiancée to let her know that he had to work late. When Jason started working at Filenes he was a sales associate at first then got promoted to the management position. He works well with distractions and is always on time to his job.

Jason is very responsible, and he is very athletic too. He played a lot of sports in high school and college. In high school he played football, basketball, and lacrosse. He spent most of his time with his girlfriend and the people he played sports with. I never really was interested in sports until I was about eight years old and saw my brother play basketball. I got more involved in sports by watching him.

Jason is 6'1" tall and works out a lot at the local gym in his free time. He never drinks or smokes cigarettes.

Our parents made sure he got a good education. He went to the University of Connecticut. He majored in Business Administration.

Jason has always been a very polite person. He never would show disrespect to our parents, his friends, his fiancée or me.

My brother also likes shopping with his girlfriend. They rarely get into arguments. Jason was popular in high school and college. Jason is a cool down to earth older brother to me. A few years ago when he and I were driving down the highway his car got a flat tire. It only took him about half an hour to put the spare tire on. He is good at working on cars because he always watched our dad when he was working on cars in the garage. He is also good at working on computers and repairing electronics. I always saw Jason as my role model because when I was about eleven years old he showed me how to impress a girl that I liked in junior high school.

Of all the people I know Jason has influenced me the most. He has always had compassion towards everyone he knows. He is a fun person to be with and spent time with me especially when I didn't have anyone to hang out with when I was younger. Someday Jason will be a great father. I will always remember all the fun times we had together hanging out and doing what we do best, having fun.

5. Student is now prepared to fully develop each supporting point.

Drafting

Adaptability to Individual Student Needs

This strategy is a useful way for all students to identify and organize their ideas before drafting and then to review their drafts for organization. The student who discovers he or she has developed chunks that focus on single points can proceed to the next step of revision. The student who discovers he or she has written chunks that contain multiple ideas can begin to reorganize as directed above. This flexibility enhances the value of the strategy when used within a classroom setting of diverse learners. Workshops, for example, can function so as to accommodate the needs of all students.

Because the strategy focuses on the use of color, adaptations would be necessary for the student who is color-blind. The strategy could be modified so that the student uses brackets, parenthesis, etc. to identify different ideas.

Because the strategy focuses on the physical use of markers or pens, adaptations might be necessary for a student with a physical disability. These adaptations might include using a computer and printer with color capability (*as illustrated with the draft*), and/or using a computer and incorporating different typefaces, fonts, and other emphasizing mechanisms such as bolding (*as illustrated below with the freewriting sample*), and/or even using a voice activated computer.

Adaptation of Color-Coding Strategy for Student Dependent on Computer to Write

Through a combination of bolding, italicizing, underlining, using different font sizes, and selecting different typefaces, students can continue to code their writing. As indicated above, some computers also have color capabilities. This student, like the student who is color blind, might also use parenthesis, brackets, asterisks, etc. to code his writing.

In order to improve education, **I think learning should be fun.** Teachers should choose subjects that will interest kids in the class. Also, *teachers should teach in interesting ways.* **I think group projects are a great way to learn. I learn so much more when I study with my classmates or when I have to do a project with my classmates.** I do not think teachers should just stand up there and lecture. **Learning should be fun.** I remember my European History teacher in high school just stood up there and lectured. In contrast, **my American History teacher used group projects like doing research on local historical places.** School systems can also improve education by having budgets to hire enough teachers and buy updated books. *Teachers must be interested in teaching.* **Learning should not be boring but fun.**

Students must want to learn and come prepared to work hard in class.

Additional Applications

Once students have acquired an understanding of this color-coding strategy, they can apply it to other academic situations.

- **Students can annotate texts.** Using colored pens, students can identify main ideas presented in a text. Pens are preferable to highlighters because students can also annotate in the margins.
 1. If students are reading these texts to find evidence for an essay they are writing, they can begin to search for relevant ideas in these texts and “color” these ideas to match the corresponding ideas in their papers.
 2. If students are reading these texts to fulfill classroom obligations or even personal interests, they can “color” the major ideas presented as a means to enhance comprehension and to prepare (if relevant) for class work (discussion, exam, etc.).

- **Students can review and organize class notes.** Using colored highlighters or pens, students can identify main ideas made during a class. They can also create a web or study guide that reflects the main ideas.