Passage or Essay Organization

"Remember me, your friend."

Even the Death Star had a weakness. While the Emperor demonstrated correct punctuation in the earlier chapter, his writing style left something to be desired. The sentence, "Remember me, who am your friend," reads like the sound of fingernails on a chalkboard. It lacks rhythm and simplicity, and these are important ideas covered in the writing common core. Perhaps the Emperor should have been less focused on the mechanics of his grammar and brushed up on his writing skills. He could have concisely said, "Remember me, your friend."

As mentioned previously, organizing sentences is critical to correctly answering Edit-Revise passage related questions, so students should be aware of the writing constructs developed in the common core curriculum: expository essays, argumentative essays, and narratives. These essay or passage outlines provide the framework for students to begin organizing parts of the passage and understanding the framework of the various paragraphs and transitions. We will focus on the five-paragraph essay structure because it is the most commonly practiced for both expository and persuasive passages, which represents the typical passage in this exam section -- narratives follow a different outline. Even though the passages are not five paragraphs long on this exam section, they will exhibit the features of the traditional five-paragraph model. Each passage will typically begin with background sentences to set the scene or perhaps a hook to grab the reader's attention. The author will make a clear, succinct main claim and then list the arguments or details that will follow to support the main thesis -- a roadmap. The traditional essay has three body paragraphs, which provide evidence and examples to support each feature or line of argument or possibly a rebuttal to contrasting arguments or information. The shorter passages on the exam may only explore one or two ideas in support of the author's claim or transition to one opposing line of thought, but the approach is similar; the body of the passage will provide examples and evidence in support of the main claim. Finally, the author will conclude by reiterating her main claim and the supporting ideas and perhaps even put forth a call to action. By middle school, most students have likely seen and implemented this traditional approach in writing classes, but not many think about how they can apply this knowledge to the Edit-Revise passage related questions on the SHSAT exam. It is useful to draw upon this writing knowledge to help reverse engineer the author's writing outline, organize paragraphs and passages, and place sentences in proper order. The outline or organization of a traditional essay follows:

Traditional Passage Organization:

I. Introduction
   A. Background Information
   B. Hook to get reader's attention
   C. Thesis or main claim
   D. Roadmap to supporting ideas to be discussed in the body of the passage

II. Body Paragraphs
   A. Topic sentence for first supporting idea
   B. Details in support of topic - includes evidence, examples, etc.
   C. Transition to opposing ideas if applicable

III. Conclusions
   A. Restate the main thesis and ideas
   B. Closing remarks or resolution