If someone asked you to tell your life story, you would probably begin by saying, “Well, I was born on...” and continue to tell about the events of your life in the order in which they happened.

Authors sometimes tell stories the same way, beginning with one point in time and describing each following event in order as it would occur naturally in time. Sometimes, however, an author may skip around and put the events of a story in a different order. For instance, the author might begin a story with something that is happening in the present and then jump back to the past. This method is called the **flashback**.

Whatever arrangement the author chooses is called the **sequence** — or order — of events in the story. Read the following paragraphs:

In the 1940s, a pretty young girl named Coretta Scott left her home in Alabama to enter Antioch College in Ohio. Her departure was an important event. Except for her sister, no one in Coretta’s African American community had finished high school, much less gone to college. It seemed a long journey, but actually, it was only the beginning of a much longer one. For in a few years Coretta Scott would be in the front lines of the struggle for civil rights with her husband, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Coretta was born near Marion, Alabama, and grew up surrounded by a large, close family. Religion was an important influence in her early life.

In this biography, the author does not use a **direct sequence**. The author begins with Coretta Scott King as a college girl, then skips back to her earliest childhood.

Another author, in describing some of the events concerning the signing of the Declaration of Independence, chooses a simple sequence of events occurring on July 2nd and 4th, 1776. The first part of the story covers just a short span of time on the afternoon of July 2nd. But in just that one scene the author tells us something about the colonists’ feelings toward independence from England and about the work of the Continental Congress, which had been going on for several weeks. Ben Franklin tells the crowd:

“We have given voice to our great desire for independence, but now we must put it in writing. A committee was formed a few weeks ago to prepare a document, one that declares our independence from England.”

Using a straight, ongoing sequence such as this allows the author to build toward the main event of the story, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, which occurs at the end.

In the second half of the story, which takes place on July 4th, there is a direct sequence of events beginning with Thomas Jefferson’s waking in the morning, going to the State House, and finally seeing his declaration approved.

Choosing a particular sequence enables an author to place the story’s highlights most effectively.
1. The pictures below illustrate facts about the life of President Theodore Roosevelt. Number them in sequence, starting with the earliest in time.

   In 1884, Roosevelt hunted buffalo in the West
   As a child, he was sickly
   In 1898, he fought in the Spanish-American War
   Roosevelt was buried at his family home in Oyster Bay, N.Y.
   Roosevelt became President of the U.S. in 1901
   Roosevelt became strong through sports like boxing

2. Circle the letter of the paragraph that has a simple, direct sequence.
   a. On July 21, 1969, men landed on the moon for the first time. The event was the crowning achievement of the Apollo space program. Apollo 8, the first mission, had swept into lunar orbit early in the evening of December 24, 1968. That evening, Christmas Eve, millions of Americans looked up at the moon and marveled that they were hearing voices and seeing pictures on television from way up there.
   b. The tall American swimmer seemed more like a fish than a man as he flashed through the water of the Olympic pool, ahead of the others in the race. He was racing against time and racing against himself. Four years before, in another Olympic pool, this same person had finished dead last in the same event, the 200-meter butterfly.
   c. In 1775, the American colonies went to war against the British. John Paul Jones joined the new American Navy and was soon given his own ship to command. In 1778, he succeeded in capturing a British warship, in an extremely hard-fought battle. As a reward, he was placed in command of a larger ship, the “Bonhomme Richard.”

3. Which of the following story plots are examples of the flashback method of presenting events?
   a. Two men are adrift in a lifeboat. The author then goes on to explain how they came to be there, after their ship caught fire at sea.
   b. As the story begins, a plane crashes on a remote mountainside. After several days pass and rescuers have not come, one of the survivors decides to hike down the mountain for help.
   c. As the story opens, an old woman lies dying. Before she dies, many happy events of her childhood pass through her mind.