

DEVELOPING AN OUTLINE

This handout is available in an alternative format on request

An outline is an organizational pattern that helps you plan your composition before you write it. Why would you bother taking the time to do this?

1. Creating an outline helps you see problems with your paper before you've started writing, so you can fix the problems before wasting a lot of time putting your ideas into full paragraphs.
2. Having an outline speeds up writing the first draft because you don't waste time pausing to remember what it was you wanted to say next.
3. Following an outline keeps you from getting lost or off-track when writing so your composition will be well-organized.
4. An outline captures all of your ideas and information so nothing will be lost or forgotten.

Your outline should be structured to fit your thesis statement and should use your brainstorming as its material. What you are doing is organizing your points and evidence in a linear (from point A to point B) way. Writing is linear. In a brainstorming diagram, you can see all kinds of ideas at once. But in an essay, you can only read one sentence at a time, from beginning to end. So you need to refine the organization of your ideas in a linear structure before writing.

There are two ways to write your outline:

1. **TOPIC** outline: uses words or phrases as headings, without punctuation
2. **SENTENCE** outline: uses full sentences

Topic outlines are easier and faster but sentence outlines are more detailed and better for mapping the complex relationships between more complicated ideas.

An outline can use Roman Numerals/Letters or Decimal form.

ROMAN:	DECIMAL:
I. Major Point	1.0
A. Supporting Point	1.1
B. Supporting Point	1.2
1. Example	1.2.1
2. Example	1.2.2
a. Statistic about 2.	1.2.2.1
b. Statistic about 2.	1.2.2.2
II. Major Point	2.0
A. Supporting Point	2.1
B. Supporting Point	2.2

In structuring your outline, there are four principles that can help you organize your points and their evidence: parallelism, coordination, subordination and division.

Parallelism is when you put words in the same grammatical order. If your first heading is "Researching the Topic" (verb, noun) then your next headings should be "Generating the Ideas" (verb, noun) and "Forming the Argument" (verb, noun). Don't be too rigid about this as sometimes it will not make sense to continue the same order: "Writing the First Draft" includes an adjective within the parallel grammatical structure.

Coordination is arranging ideas according to their value, or importance: an A is equal to a B, a 1 to a 2, and an a) to a b). A/B are major points, 1/2 are explanations for a major point, and a)/b) are examples given as evidence. Here is an example of good coordination:

- A. Winter Sports
- B. Summer Sports

Here is an example of poor coordination:

- A. Winter Sports
- B. Skiing
- C. Swimming

The problem is that B and C are not groups of sports, as A is, but examples of sports.

Correction:

- A. Winter Sports
 - 1. Skiing
 - 2. Skating
- B. Summer Sports
 - 1. Swimming
 - 2. Tennis

Subordination is when you arrange ideas in levels of significance: major and minor. You should arrange your ideas from abstract to concrete or general to specific. In the correction above, the general categories of sports are at a higher level than the specific examples from each category.

This makes it an example of good subordination. Here is an example of poor subordination:

- A. Winter Sports
 - 1. Skiing
 - 2. Danger of frostbite
 - 3. Good exercise

The problems are that there is an A without a B, and 2 and 3 are not equal to 1. Correction:

- A. Winter Sports
 - 1. Skiing
 - a) dangers
 - b) benefits
 - 2. Skating
 - a) dangers
 - b) benefits
- B. Summer Sports
 - 1. Swimming
 - a) dangers
 - b) benefits
 - 2. Tennis
 - a) dangers
 - b) benefits

Division is how you separate the kinds of points you are making. There are usually several options for dividing your ideas. Be consistent by using only one basis of division at each point and making the basis distinct. In the above correction, the first basis for division is kinds of sports, the second is examples of sports, and the third is the dangers and benefits of those sports.