

Creating an Outline

What is an outline?

An outline is defined by Webster's Dictionary as a preliminary draft or plan. An outline combines a thesis with research, from which a writer can create a unified essay. Think of an outline as a road map. Writers need to know which way they are traveling before the trip begins!

What are some of the benefits of using an outline?

- Provides structure and direction for a written piece
- Establishes order of main points
- Points out areas that need to be developed
- Gives confidence to the writer—having a plan helps!



How is an outline created?

1. Ask yourself...

What is the topic that I will be writing about?

What is my thesis statement?

2. Create an interesting title that relates to your thesis statement. Begin your outline with this title. (This can be written later in the process also)

3. Choose the type of outline to be used. If an outline is required for an assignment, you will usually have to complete a Formal outline. However, starting with an Informal outline and then proceeding to a Working outline can be a good way to help you to start thinking about your topic.

- a. *Informal*— List of main points
- b. *Working*— List of main points, according to importance, along with some supporting details
- c. *Formal*— List of main points and supporting details, according to importance, shown with indentations, numbers, and letters

* *See reverse for sample outlines.*

4. Identify main ideas that support your thesis.

5. Provide at least two details (or pieces of evidence) for each main idea.

6. When finished, ask yourself:

Does my evidence support my thesis?

Does the order of the ideas in my outline make sense?

Is each main idea supported with two or more details?

Do any of my main ideas need additional evidence?

Are any of my main ideas repetitive?

7. Start writing by using your outline as a road map! But remember, your outline should be flexible; make changes as needed!

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	Informal Outline	Working Outline	Formal Outline
Definition	Proposed main ideas are listed	Main ideas are listed using a hierarchy of importance, often using indentations to indicate supporting details	Main ideas and supporting details are organized using a hierarchy, shown by indentations, numbers, and letters. Thesis statement is included.
Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Idea 2. Idea 3. Idea 	<p>First main idea</p> <p>Supporting evidence or detail</p> <p>Supporting evidence or detail</p> <p>Second Main Idea</p> <p>Supporting evidence or detail</p> <p>Supporting evidence or detail</p>	<p>Thesis Statement</p> <p>I. First reason</p> <p>A. Supporting evidence</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Detail of evidence 2. Detail of evidence <p>B. Supporting Evidence</p> <p>II. Second Reason</p> <p>A. Supporting evidence</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Detail of evidence 2. Detail of evidence
Sample Outline	<p><i>Benefits of Homeschooling</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Choice according to lesson topics and duration 2. Allows frequent field trips 3. Better student-teacher ratio 	<p><i>Benefits of Homeschooling</i></p> <p>Choice in Curriculum</p> <p>Variety of subjects</p> <p>Flexibility in duration of lessons and units</p> <p>Choice in Location</p> <p>Take field trips</p> <p>Educational vacations</p>	<p><i>Benefits of Homeschooling</i></p> <p>Homeschooling allows for freedom in the classroom.</p> <p>I. Choice in Curriculum</p> <p>A. Flexibility in subject matter</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student interests 2. Freedom from standards <p>B. Duration of lessons</p> <p>II. Choice in Location</p>

Information on this handout adapted from:

Bullock, Richard. *The Norton Field Guide to Writing*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.

“Using Outlines” *Writing Tutorial Services*. 2004. Indiana University <http://www.indiana.edu/~wvts/pamphlets/outlines.shtml>