

How to Write an Outline

Have you ever been part of a conversation that was difficult to follow? It can be very frustrating if the person speaking does not make their point clearly! As a writer and speaker, you want to make sure that you help your audience understand the flow of your ideas and argument. This can be done by clearly moving from one point to the next. Using an outline before and after you write your papers or speeches ensures that your points are organized well.

Benefits of an outline before writing:

1. Helps you focus on the points you want to make.
2. Organizes your information.

Benefits of an outline after writing (Reverse Outlining):

1. Identifies that all of the information is in the correct paragraphs.
2. Reveals information that is included but is not needed in the paper.

How to write an outline:

1. After you know the main points of your paper or speech, use the outline to organize those points. To make sure the points support your thesis, it is helpful to write your thesis at the top of the outline.
2. Choose whether to write your outline with complete sentences or phrases.
3. Use the alphanumeric system to organize your outline.
 - A. Use Roman Numerals (I, II, III, IV, V...) for the main points.
 - B. Use capital letters (A, B, C, etc.) to give the information within each point.
4. Decide the order for your points. Sometimes papers start with the most important point and end with the least important point, but sometimes it is more effective to start with the least important point and end with the most important.
5. List your research, quotes, stories, and information with each point.
6. If there is research that you have that does not easily fit in a point, then you can create a new point or decide not to use that information.

How to write and use a Reverse Outline:

1. After you finish writing the paper, read each paragraph and write a one sentence summary of that paragraph. If you cannot write only 1 sentence, that may mean that the paragraph includes too many points, and the paragraph should be broken into smaller paragraphs.
2. After writing the summary sentences, check to make sure that all the information in each paragraph fits with the topic of that paragraph.
3. Revise your paper so that each paragraph is focused on one point and all “extra” information is moved to another paragraph or removed.

General Outline

Note: In a 5 paragraph essay, each point will be its own paragraph

I. Introduction

- A. Hook (a quote, statistic, or question that grabs the reader's attention)
- B. 1-2 general sentences (background information the reader should know or plot summary)
- C. Thesis (one sentence that provides a focus for the paper and may include the main points)

II. Body Paragraph 1 – 1st point

- A. Topic sentence (1st sentence of the paragraph that states the main point of the paragraph)
- B. Supporting information/research
- C. Explanation of supporting information/research
- D. Concluding sentence (summary of the paragraph & transition to the next paragraph)

III. Body Paragraph 2 – 2nd point

- A. Topic Sentence of 2nd point
- B. Supporting information/research
- C. Explanation and evaluation of information/research
- D. Concluding sentence for the paragraph

IV. Body Paragraph 3 – 3rd point

- A. Topic Sentence of 3rd point
- B. Supporting information/research
- C. Explanation and evaluation of information/research
- D. Concluding sentence for the paragraph

V. Conclusion

- A. Restatement of the thesis
(a sentence that summarizes the thesis without copying it word for word)
- B. 1-2 Summarizing statements
(summary of each main point without giving new information)
- C. Concluding sentence
(sentence that refers back to the hook by referencing the quote or statistic or answering the question)