



Center for Writing and Speaking

E NO. 5 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

Outlining Your Paper

An outline is designed to indicate the direction of your paper and can be done before you write as an organizational strategy or after you write as a revision technique. Creating an outline before you begin writing a paper is one way to make sure all your thoughts and arguments make sense in the final draft. These steps can help you formulate an outline that should lead to a strong essay.

Organize and prioritize.

Look at what you wrote down while brainstorming or developing your topic, then organize each item based on its importance, its relationship to other pieces of information, or its chronological time within a larger framework. After completing this stage, you should have a good idea of exactly what you will discuss in your paper and how you will prove your argument.

Write a working thesis statement.

Before you can outline your paper, you need to know what you are proving in the essay. Writing a thesis statement, however preliminary or unpolished, will give your outline (and therefore your paper) direction and focus. Go back to your brainstorming notes, and think about what you want to discuss, what you've learned from the research, and why your topic is important.

Order the main points.

With your thesis statement in mind, look at your organized notes and decide how to prioritize your thoughts to prove your thesis most effectively. Your supporting evidence should flow logically and smoothly from one point to the next.

Organize the detailed arguments.

Now that you have the main points in order, go back to your brainstorming and research notes to decide how to prove each point. Write down a sentence or two describing what you will discuss under each main point.

Outlining after you write

Outlining after you write can help you determine whether or not your argument develops logically and effectively. Try this strategy as a way of evaluating the organization and content of your paper. When outlining your paper, make sure you are true to what you wrote, not to what you intended to write.

- Convert paragraph topic sentences into the main points of your outline.
- Transfer the supporting ideas from your paper to subpoints under your main topics.
- Evaluate the outline. Is it logical, effective, and complete?
- Rearrange paragraphs and ideas. Add or delete information.
- Revise your paper based on your outline.

(continued on reverse)

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Outlining Your Paper, Continued

Potential Outline Skeleton- Here is just one way you could begin to structure your paper.

1. Introduction information
 - a. Thesis
2. Topic Sentence
 - a. Supporting evidence and analysis
 - b. More supporting information and analysis
3. Topic Sentence
 - a. Supporting evidence and analysis
 - b. More supporting information and analysis
4. Etc.
5. Conclusion
 - a. How it relates back to thesis