

Create a Working Outline

After all preliminary research is done, the working outline is created to organize all of the ideas you plan to include in the research paper.

A working outline should be set up using the following format:

1. Begin with a thesis statement.
2. Each main idea of the project should then be numbered with Roman numerals (I, II, III, etc.) beginning with the introduction.
3. Information that will be used to support or develop each main idea is to be indented and labeled with capital letters (A, B, C, etc.).
4. Additional information which gives more detail to a supporting idea is also indented and labeled with Arabic numbers (1, 2, 3, etc.).
5. The final section of the working outline is the conclusion.
6. Always use at least two divisions for each category. Outlines cannot have an I without a II or an A without a B.
7. **Information should NOT be put into complete sentences. Keep phrases short and to the point.**

Example of a working outline:

Thesis: _____

- I. Introduction

- II. First Main Idea
 - A. Support
 - B. Support

- III. Second Main Idea
 - A. Support
 - B. Support
 - 1. Detail
 - 2. Detail

- IV. Third Main Idea
 - A. Support
 - B. Support
 - 1. Detail
 - 2. Detail

- V. Conclusion
 - A. Restate Thesis
 - B. Restate Thesis



Developing an Outline

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To review a sample outline, see the OWL document Sample Outline at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_outlinS.html. For more information about writing research papers at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/index.html>, see our overview page as well as our new, extensive research paper workshop. For general writing concerns at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/index.html>, see our overview page on that topic. See the OWL document When You Start to Write for more help with the early stages of the writing process at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_plan2.html.

Developing an Outline

An outline is:

- A logical, general description
- A schematic summary
- An organizational pattern
- A visual and conceptual design of your writing

An outline reflects logical thinking and clear classification.

Purpose

General:

- Aids in the process of writing

Specific:

- Helps you organize your ideas
- Presents your material in a logical form
- Shows the relationships among ideas in your writing
- Constructs an ordered overview of your writing
- Defines boundaries and groups

Process

Before you begin:

- Determine the **purpose** of your paper.
- Determine the **audience** you are writing for.
- Develop the **thesis** of your paper.

Then:

- **Brainstorm:** List all the ideas that you want to include in your paper.
- **Organize:** Group related ideas together.
- **Order:** Arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete.
- **Label:** Create main and sub headings.

Theory

An outline has a balanced structure based on the following principles:

- Parallelism
- Coordination
- Subordination
- Division

Parallelism

Whenever possible, in writing an outline, **coordinate heads** should be expressed in parallel form. That is, nouns should be made parallel with nouns, verb forms with verb forms, adjectives with adjectives, and so on (Example: Nouns: computers, programs, users; Verbs: to compute, to program, to use; Adjectives: home computers, new programs, experienced users). Although parallel structure is desired, logical and clear writing should not be sacrificed simply to maintain parallelism. (For example, there are times when nouns and gerunds at the same level of an outline are acceptable.) Reasonableness and flexibility of form is preferred to rigidity.

Coordination

In outlining, those items which are of equal significance have comparable numeral or letter designations: an *A* is equal to a *B*, a *1* to a *2*, an *a* to a *b*, etc. Coordinates should be seen as having the same value.

Coordination is a principle that enables a writer to maintain a coherent and consistent document.

Correct coordination

- A. Word processing programs
- B. Database programs
- C. Spreadsheet programs

Faulty coordination

- A. Word processing programs
- B. Microsoft Word
- C. Page Maker

Explanation: Word is a type of word processing program and should be treated as a subdivision. Page Maker is a type of desktop publishing program. One way to correct coordination would be:

- A. Types of programs
 - 1. Word processing
 - 2. Desktop publishing
- B. Evaluation of programs
 - 1. Word processing
 - a. Word
 - b. Word Perfect
 - 2. Desktop Publishing
 - a. Page Maker
 - b. Quark Express

Subordination

In order to indicate levels of significance, an outline uses major and minor headings. Thus in ordering ideas, you should organize it from general to specific or from abstract to concrete- the more general or abstract the term, the higher the level or rank in the outline. This principle allows your material to be ordered in terms of logic and requires a clear articulation of the relationship between component parts used in the outline. Subdivisions of each higher division should always have the

same relationship to the whole.

Correct subordination

- A. Word processing programs
 - 1. Microsoft Word
 - 2. Word Perfect
- B. Desktop publishing programs
 - 1. PageMaker
 - 2. Quark Express

Faulty subordination

- A. Word processing programs
 - 1. Word
 - 2. Useful
 - 3. Obsolete

Explanation: There is an *A* without a *B*. Also 1, 2, and 3 are not equal; Word is a type of word processing program, and *useful* and *obsolete* are qualities. One way to correct this faulty subordination is:

- A. Word
 - 1. Positive features
 - 2. Negative features
- B. Word Perfect
 - 1. Positive features
 - 2. Negative features

Division

To divide you always need at least two parts; therefore, there can never be an *A* without a *B*, a *1* without a *2*, an *a* without a *b*, etc. Usually there is more than one way to divide parts; however, when dividing use only one basis of division at each rank, and make the basis of division as sharp as possible.

Correct division

- A. Personal computers: hardware
 - 1. Types
 - 2. Cost
 - 3. Maintenance
- B. Personal computers: software

Faulty division

- A. Computers
 - 1. Mainframe
 - 2. Micro
 - a. Floppy disk
 - b. Hard disk
- B. Computer uses
 - 1. Institutional
 - 2. Personal

Form

The most important rule for outlining form is to be consistent!

An outline can use **topic** or **sentence** structure.

A **topic** outline uses words or phrases for all entries and uses no punctuation after entries.

Advantages: presents a brief overview of work and is generally easier and faster to write than a sentence outline. **LESS CHANCE OF PLAGIARISM!**

A **sentence** outline uses complete sentences for all entries and uses correct punctuation.

Advantages: presents a more detailed overview of work including possible topic sentences and is easier and faster for writing the final paper.

An outline can use **Roman numerals**/letters or decimal form.

Roman Numeral

I.

A.

B.

1.

2.

a.

b.

See OWL sample outline BELOW

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_outlinS.html.



Sample Outline

For more information about outlines, see the Purdue OWL handout, Developing an Outline at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_outlin.html. For more information about writing research papers, see our workshop on this subject at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/index.html>. For more information about general writing concerns, see our list of handouts on that subject at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/index.html>.

Purpose: To show how programs written for microcomputers relate to the process of writing.

Thesis: Microcomputer programs can have a positive effect on students' writing if both the potentials and limitations of the programs are understood.

Audience: Current college and university students.

Microcomputer Programs and the Process of Writing

I. Major Steps in the Writing Process

- A. Organizing
- B. Writing the first draft
- C. Evaluating
- D. Revising

II. Writing Programs for the Microcomputer

- A. Types of Programs and Their Relationship to the Writing Process
 1. Thought
 - a. Use in organizing
 - b. Use in revising
 2. Word Processors
 - a. Use in writing the first draft

- b. Use in revising
 - 3. Analytical programs: grammar, style, spelling
 - a. Use in evaluating
 - b. Use in revising
- B. Positive and Negative Aspects of Computer Writing Programs
 - 1. Positive features
 - a. Less time spent on repetitive or mechanical writing tasks
 - b. Greater flexibility and versatility in writing process
 - c. Increased revision strategies
 - d. Specific learning possibilities
 - 2. Negative features
 - a. The increased time spent on learning software programs and computers
 - b. The availability of hardware and software
 - c. The unrealistic expectations of users
 - i. A cure-all for writing problems
 - ii. A way to avoid learning correct grammar/syntax/spelling
 - iii. A method to reduce time spent on writing proficiently
 - iv. A simple process to learn and execute
- C. Future Possibilities of Computer Programs for Writing
 - 1. Rapid change
 - 2. Improved programs
 - 3. Increased use and availability
 - 4. More realistic assessment of value - critical work

The following information must remain intact on every handout printed for distribution.

This page is located at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/general/gl_outlinS.html

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