



How to Write an Outline

Many students struggle when required to write an outline for something and frequently they make it much more difficult a task than it really is. But if you have never had to make an outline for something, the following tips and suggestions may be helpful.

What is an outline?

An outline is a plan on how to present specific material or summarizes material from research. It is typically used for organizing material for a speech, course or research paper but occasionally professors will request students to outline chapter or textbook material as an assignment. An outline shows the order of the topics, their importance and relationship to each other. It is a way to break down material into parts. This information is directed toward a student preparing for a composition paper or speech.

What kind of outlines are there?

There are two main types of outlines; one is the topic outline where your heading and subparts are generally written as a phrase or in a word or two. The second type of outline is a sentence outline where every entry is written as a complete sentence.

How do I know how to make an outline?

When writing an outline most students use alternating series of numbers and letters to indicate main topics, supporting information. How you arrange the information may depend on your topic and the assignment. Sometimes using a chronological order works well if you are listing reasons for something or giving a sequential account of something. Other times you may be summarizing how different things are related to a topic and showing that relationship may work better. Most students use a more common way of outlining that allows the writer to go from general information to specific details about the topic.

What is a thesis statement and where does it belong in the outline?

The thesis statement is the first section of the outline. It is an introduction to what your paper or presentation are about and sets the stage for the listener or reader. The thesis statement is the central idea of the paper and it is

recommended that be written as a complete sentence so you don't have to come back to eat and keep rewriting it. The thesis statement should indicate the point of view or argument that you are making regarding the topic.

What does an outline look like?

An outline can be as extensive and detailed as the material you are outlining requires but note the following example:

- I. Main topic Thesis sentence
 - II. Point #1
 - A. supporting information
 - 1. why is it relative
 - 2. example
 - B. additional supporting information
 - 1. relativity
 - 2. example
 - a. main point to explain example
 - b. definition of terms
 - c. why it is important
 - III. Point #2 etc.

If you have a main topic - I. for example, then there must be a II. If you have a subheading of capital A, then you must have a subheading of a capital B. If you have numbers below each subheading then you must have at least two subheadings for each area. Depending on your assignment and the length of your paper will determine how many main points and subheadings you will need. However, each heading and subheading must have at least two parts to it.

There are many resources online that give tips for writing specific types of outlines. For example there are outlines that explain how to write an outline for a five paragraph essay, how to write outlines in a specific format such as APA style, writing outlines for research papers, scripts, short stories, etc. For more specific information check out several websites with information about writing outlines. As always when using the internet for research information, make sure that you are using a credible site that isn't just putting forth someone's personal opinion as opposed to information that you can trust for research purposes