

## WRITING AN OUTLINE

### WHY write an outline

An outline is a tool for improving writing. An outline can help you:

- determine a logical organization (sequence) of your main ideas and supporting evidence and explanation
- check that all your ideas and information are on-task and relevant to your thesis
- see at a glance where you need more evidence to make your point

An outline also saves you time and frustration. It provides a “picture” of your essay which allows you to predict many of its strengths and weaknesses before you write it. You will often find it much easier and faster to fix problems at this stage than after you have written a complete draft!

### WHEN to write an outline

Timing is critical to writing an outline. Outlining is best done as a middle stage in the writing process, not at the very beginning. Follow these steps in the order given before attempting to outline:

- 1/ Read, gather information, and think about your essay topic.
- 2/ Take notes, jot down ideas
- 3/ Generate a thesis (you might need several tries)

### HOW to write an outline

Start with your main ideas. This helps you know whether you are treating the subject in a full and relevant manner. Then, generalizing about these main ideas, formulate your thesis.

or

Use a complete sentence to express your thesis and each main idea. This is essential for expressing how different ideas connect to each other and how each supports the thesis.

Fill in supporting ideas/examples/details and information after you have written your thesis and main ideas. You can use phrases and sentence fragments here.

Critique your finished outline. Check that it suggests your essay will make a convincing, relevant argument. If you spot main ideas that need more support, add evidence. If you spot irrelevant information, eliminate it. If logical sequencing of ideas seems troubling, change it.

**(Now try using the outline worksheet on the back)**

## OUTLINE WORKSHEET

Directions: (1) Write your main ideas. Be sure each is a complete sentence. (2) Write your thesis, basing it on what the main ideas suggest. Tinker with wording until you are satisfied that the thesis is a precise and useful expression of your thoughts. (3) Decide on a reasonable sequence for presenting the main ideas and number them accordingly. (4) Fill in supporting details. (5) Check each "paragraph" unit for relevance and completeness. (6) Check the whole outline for relevance and completeness.

**Note: It is important to complete these steps in the order given.**

THESIS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Main Idea (#): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Support: \* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

Main Idea (#): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Support: \* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

Main Idea (#): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Support: \* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* \_\_\_\_\_

Etc.

Last step: Add the following to this outline when you are writing your first complete draft:

- \* introductory comments that lead into your thesis
- \* transitions which help tie paragraphs to each other
- \* transitions within paragraphs to help organize your evidence
- \* a concluding paragraph