

Creating an Outline

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Before beginning to write a paper, many people like to make an outline of their ideas. This allows them to plan out their paper and make a handy guide to follow as they write. Making and using an outline also assures that the writer will not leave important information out of the final draft.

Thesis Statement: This must be written before you can start your outline. A thesis statement is an explanation of what you will be proving in your paper. When writing your outline, keep the thesis in mind. Every detail in your paper should work to explain and support your thesis. Use your thesis as a guide to help you organize your ideas and to help you stay on track. Feel free to change your thesis statement as you research and/or write. You may want to start with a broad research question and narrow the thesis as you learn more about your topic.

Organizing: Look at the notes that you have made while brainstorming, then rank this information in order of importance. An outline will allow you to determine the main ideas and important details. It will also aid you in arranging your ideas coherently. Organize your ideas in some sort of order, whether it is chronological, or by similarities found within the information. This will give you an idea of exactly what your paper will focus on.

Consistency: Make sure your organization is consistent. Decide whether you are organizing your paper in chronological order or grouping together similar ideas. Do not deviate from your chosen style of organization.

Transitions: When organizing your outline, make sure that topics are set up in an order that will allow the paragraphs to flow easily from one to another. Look for ways to reasonably make connections between ideas. Note these transitions on your outline.

Adding Details: After making an outline of your main ideas, examine and research each important point. Add the details that you discover to the outline. Think about how you will develop each point. Some ways you can develop your points are by using anecdotes, explanations, examples, and quotes.

Avoid Becoming Redundant: Once you have proven a point, you must move on to the next idea. Every paragraph should contain new evidence that supports your thesis. To avoid becoming redundant, include new examples and quotes throughout your paper.

Conclusion: Your ideas should grow in strength as the outline progresses. Be sure that your conclusion reiterates your main ideas; however, the ideas must be expressed in a new way. A conclusion should not be a regurgitation of the introduction or thesis.

After Writing the Outline: Look at the outline. Does it make sense? Does your outline contain the information and prove the points you hoped it would? If the answer is no, reevaluate the outline and make all necessary changes.