

Organizing a working outline

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Using Basic Outline Form

When making an outline, you must follow some basic rules:

1. The title must be centered.
2. The thesis statement must be written in a complete sentence under the title.
3. Major ideas, as well as supporting details and examples, are written in phrases.
4. The first letter of each phrase is capitalized.
5. A Roman numeral I must be followed by a II. An A must have a B. A 1 must be followed by a 2. Indent the parallel items the same distance from the left margin.
6. Parallel grammar structure must be used.
7. The introduction and conclusion are not included in the outline.
8. The outline is double-spaced throughout.

Title of Research Paper

Thesis Statement:

- I. First major idea in first body paragraph
 - A. Supporting detail for first major idea
 - 1. Definition
 - 2. Explanation
 - 3. Example
 - B. Supporting detail for first major idea
 - C. Supporting detail for first major idea
- II. Second major idea in the second body paragraph
 - A. Supporting idea for second major idea
 - B. Supporting idea for second major idea
 - 1. Description
 - 2. Example
- III. Third major idea in the third body paragraph
 - A. Supporting detail for the third major idea
 - B. Supporting detail for the third major idea
 - C. Supporting detail for the third major idea
 - 1. Example
 - 2. Example
 - 3. Example

And so on...

Following this example when organizing your information will help you determine where you have a lack of support. It might become clear that you need to find some more support for a certain area. It will also help you avoid including irrelevant information. You will only include evidence that specifically supports the main idea in each paragraph.

Organizing the supporting evidence

Now that you've collected all the data you need for your research paper, it's time to organize it into an outline, following basic outline form. Look over your notes to find the major divisions of ideas. Write a topic sentence for each paragraph, making sure that it is directly related to the thesis statement. At this time, you should consider the pattern of organization. Your pattern of organization could be any one of the following:

- List of items
- Cause and effect
- Time order
- Comparison and/or contrast
- Problem and solution
- Definition and example
- Classification
- Analysis

Your notes and ideas will lend themselves to one of these patterns more easily than another. Decide which one will help you support your thesis more easily. Once you are ready to write the outline, you can follow the map you've laid out in front of you. Start with writing out the title and thesis statement at the top. Then use phrases and parallel structure to move through each body paragraph. Include the supporting ideas and evidence under each one until you reach the end. Remember not to include the introduction or conclusion in your outline.

Finalizing the outline

After you've written the research paper and revised it, you should come back and finalize your outline. That means re-writing it so that it is a mirror image of your paper. Doing this exercise will help you be sure that you have adequate and relevant support in each paragraph.